

PRIVATE OPINION

Books by the same Author

THE SPRING JOURNEY

PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH

BEETHOVEN

TWENTY-SEVEN POEMS

PRIVATE OPINION

A Commonplace-Book by

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London

COBDEN-SANDERSON

One Montague Street

First published June 1936

Printed in England for
R. COBDEN-SANDERSON LTD.
by the Shenvall Press
and bound by the
Leighton-Straker Bookbinding Co. Ltd.

For my wife

Pope's Odyssey : the first book I ever bought. It turned up in a little shop in Ebury Street, and cheap, because the third of four volumes was missing. Why I bought it I cannot conceive, unless it was because I thought all old books interfused with magic, like Napoleon's *Book of Fate*, which I had found a year or two before at the bottom of the Coburg Box, copied into a worn marbled note-book by my great-grandmother.

There was also a certain excitement in buying something in Ebury Street. From our house in Buckingham Palace Gardens, I had invariably crossed it twice a day on the way to the park. But crossed it only. My nurses pushed the pram smartly here, and only relaxed on the flourishing confines of Chester Square. If you went down Ebury Street to the left there was a possibility of "meeting a poor man," or several; of little boys playing with their tops in the street; of the greengrocers having an open cabbage-stall on the pavement; of chalk squares and numbers drawn on the road; shouts from the bony playgrounds of the Peabody Trust; nameless infection beyond the reach of Formamint: of contact, in fact, with what I believed to be hopeless necessity. Even in Chester Square there was necessity, although not so ugly. Two of my cousins, M. and K., who used to live there, had moved into a little house over a shop in Elizabeth Street. In Elizabeth Street and over a shop. What made their fall the greater, the house in the square had been a corner house. My nurses told me that it was so terrible for Miss Mottram, their governess, whom we

often met on our walks. Fortunately, however, M. has since married a duke, and can now no doubt live in a corner house again, if she chooses.

I can only have bought *Oxford Prize Poems 1810*, because of a grand title in the index: Beneficial Effects of Inoculation. After the first little rapture, however, I have lost any wish to go so far as to read the poem.

Long had bewail'd Arabia's hapless swains
Their groves deserted, and uncultur'd plains . . .

The rest I can make up for myself, though I might not have thought of "heav'n-taught Nymph" with the neat appogiatura *c* beside it and the laconic footnote, *c Inoculation*. But the Nymph seems lymphatic enough in all conscience.

It is amusing to see the anonymity of bad, but successful, "period" verse, laboriously exhaling from bad, but successful, verse to-day; from verse, that is, which is not only to-day's but this afternoon's. Like:

Fled refugee through catacombs,
of mind: embellished emptiness
Prodigiously; sensed impress
of rain reticulating tombs.

Notwithstanding, prize-day is twice a term now, and Auden is an Old Boy, and there seem to be different monitors whenever one opens the School Mag.

A Journal of the Life, Travels, and Christian Experiences of Thomas Chalkley begins well.

I was born on the third day of the third month, 1675, in Southwark, and descended of honest and religious parents, who were very careful of me, and brought me up in the fear of the Lord; and oftentimes counselled me to sobriety, and reproved me for wantonness; and that light spirit, which is incident to youth, they were careful to nip in the bud; so that I have cause to bless God, through Christ, on the behalf of my tender parents.

In later life the excellent Chalkley ministered to the New World, and died at Fat-Hog Bay in the island of Tortola, 1741.

To those who have not the religious spirit, that spirit remains inexplicable. Inexplicable but delightful. I shall never enjoy anything more than its various manifestations in my own life; the 'chapel' I built in a shrubbery near Dorking, when I was ten; the eighteen-penny rosary I bought in a Catholic church at Scarborough, five years later; even the terrified vows I made when I was ill at seventeen. On each occasion, the whole thing was true, I was in touch. And then suddenly I was not in touch any more. Not even when the wife of an official of the Lunatic Asylum in Aberdeen wrote to me, after a chance meeting on a Japanese liner, that I had "a beautiful spirit" and that I ought

to attend, at a consideration of so much a day, a Group House-Party at Oriel, Oxford.

Any picture of the wicked hedonist ruffling through his years omits one particular: that the true hedonist, to his list of pleasures, is sincerely happy to add the pleasure of faith. But the sacrifice may be too great. Only the soul demands the abnegation of reason before consenting to become intoxicated: the senses ask no more than its suspension.

Yet how seldom the ungodly, struggling with the outgoings, the exertion, the constant malaise of ungodliness, get away with it: how little they experience of the voluptuous delight of the good. The excellent Chalkley, at ten years old, read the Bible on a certain occasion:

So their sport for that time was spoiled, and mine in that practise for ever; for I never (as I remember) played with them more, but as soon as I came home, offered my new and untouched pack of cards to the fire.

That light spirit which is incident to youth had no comparable pleasures for me. One irreverent pleasure, however, it has given me: and that is a pleasure in, as it were, the harmonics of religious observance. In settling back into a stall, after the mumbled first lesson, while the central heating brings with it a faint smell of surplice as the choir stands again; in looking up the anthem, the familiar Goss or Crouch or Stainer, and

waiting for the prim, reliable, compassionate music to soar; in watching the colours of the windows dwindle against the dark, and the oil lamps climb weakly towards the vaulting; in following the inexigent gaze of a sparse congregation as the Canon clammers into the pulpit; in balancing the echo of a fallen umbrella against a resonant sixpence when the congregation relax after the text. Such is my pleasure. The fortunate Chalkley at whom it is so easy to laugh spent the better part of seventy years in a state of splendid exaltation, along with all who have thought it a privilege to carry their creed abroad, only because he never heard the voice which cries, It is very fine, but I do not see how it can be true.

Dodsley's Collection of Poems, in Six Volumes, 1743-1758. After a book has been to the forefront of a room for a certain time, one has the impression that one has read it. Dodsley is, however, unreadable. He can only be plunged through, in that search for the unknown lyric, the buried, triumphant couplet, which never emerges, neither from the Spenserian imitations, nor the apostrophes to Delia.

Once I thought I knew about eighteenth-century verse. I wrote a reproofing notice of Professor Elton's *Survey*, in which amongst other complaints, I said, "There is no mention whatever of Thomas Russell, the best sonneteer before Bowles, nor of Bampfylde, almost his equal." Five years later, I have to look up in

Professor Elton to discover anything about Jago or Mendez beyond their bare existence; and for the first fact about the neglected Bampfylde I rack my memory in vain. Nevertheless the charm still works. In the level corridors of eighteenth-century verse there is the illusion of order, and balance and leisure.

And come you, who for thought are at little expense,
Who indite gentle pastoral, ballad, or song;
You see with smooth numbers, and not too much
sense,
How the verses run easy and glibly along;
And the rhyme at the close how it falls with a clink,
So kind are the Muses that sport on the Link.

It is a pity if only those Muses are to be respected in future who work on the line; though the poets in the School Mag. are already labelled prosaically by their political convictions. What saves Dodsley's poets is that they were content to be poets; the poets who have made capital—the word is an interloper—out of the Marxian ideology are in danger of getting stuck in the same kind of mud as the Neo-Georgians; of petering out under another aspect of sentimentality. To re-open Dodsley is to renew the refreshing—at times—experience of turning one's eyes away from an untrustworthy embryo to an accomplished funeral urn.

Anne Blanchard published her *Midnight Reflections* by subscription, in 1822, and it would be safe to wonder

whether, in that year and at the most among subscribers, they excited enthusiasm, even in the opinion of the twenty-six clergymen on the list. Who was Miss Blanchard? Probably a governess at Badminton, or else why should the ladies Elizabeth, Georgina and Susan Somerset buy each a copy, as well as the Duchess of Beaufort? At any rate, almost certainly a governess, and almost certainly Miss. The *Sonnet to Mr. P.* urges that double conclusion. Mr. P. is upbraided with authority; but with an authority which owes, very possibly, some of its vigilance to disappointment:

And do the wounds of conscious guilt ne'er rend
Your haughty bosom?

The unkindly reader can draw his own deductions from "haughty." Miss Blanchard at night, he may say, must often have dreamed of flying; at times, of corkscrew staircases.

Does not the fair form
Of her whose innocence you late betray'd
Stalk round your bed, your perjur'd faith upbraid
And call you murderer? Does she not attend
Your midnight revelry? Can Bacchus warm
Your soul to mirth?

Nevertheless, her waking mind set a value on celibacy. It cannot have been disagreeable at Badminton.

Though imperial robes inviting,
Mid the gorgeous painted dome!

With the claims of love uniting
Woo me to forsake my home.
Though Golconda too should proffer
Her immense exhaustless stores,
Still I'd scorn the splendid offer,
Still prefer my native shores.

Also, among the twenty-six clergymen, a Mr. Bowles had subscribed for three copies; and, since most of the subscribers are from Wiltshire or the adjoining counties, it is very likely that Mr. Bowles was the Vicar of Bremhill. As a partial substitute for uncertain imperial robes the friendship—three copies imply friendship—of so justly celebrated a poet seems fair enough. And there was another divine, unnamed, on whose lips persuasion's accents dwelled. And a third, to whom Miss Blanchard addressed her *Lines on a Minister's Leaving his Residence*.

Ah! woe's the day! Yes, he has said adieu:—
Bring me the willow

and so in the same key until a comfortable conclusion:

Just as he gained the love of every heart,
To leave us thus! But cease, 'tis heaven's behest!
The Great Supreme decreed that we should part;
And we, resign'd,
Must bear in mind,
That His decrees are greatest, wisest, best.

Miss Blanchard was greatly privileged in her understanding of the Divine Will, although in her comments upon it the governess is occasionally more alert than the poet.

Uncertain! Surely not!

she exclaims, at the beginning of her *Lines on a Friend's Fearing to die Uncertain of the Future State*. And, again, in a *Midnight Reflection*,

But I would ask, ye who thus spend your days,
In one continued round of vain pursuits,
How will ye meet the certain stroke of death?
(For tho' delayed for years 'tis certain still,
And may perchance surprise you unawares.)

Herself, she announces *passim* her intention of meeting death with relish, tempered, now and again, by defiance.

Hope's cheering prospect opens to my sight,
Points to the peaceful grave my anxious view.

And she leaves no doubt that she derived some gratification from her own sufferings.

The odd thing about this tiny and valueless book is that it calls to mind a personality. I can think I see Miss Blanchard: smallish; brownish; in better health than her conscience approves; disliking equally Catholics, Anabaptists, and Enthusiasts in general; the subject of cruel comment in the housekeeper's room; tireless in

underlining, by precept and repeated precept, the message of Christmas and the message of Easter; a poetess from a sense of duty rather than inclination: composing her *Midnight Reflections* while the girls were busy at their German exercises, or after the solitary luncheons from a tray in the school-room, on days when the Duchess informed her that she "need" not come down to the dining-room; asking aloud, but with resignation, at the beginning of each winter, whether she should get through; and unexpectedly putting on the manner of a lioness at Parish Meetings, and evenings with the Dorcas Society, when the girls were getting too old to need her.

Gray's Poems and Letters. When anybody asks me, Did you enjoy being at school? my instinct replies No; although reason can offer no grounds for recalling myself unhappy. When Gray is in my hand I cannot think of school except as a kind of Symposium, or as an endless, innocent game. I want to ask a younger brother about the captive linnet and the rolling circle. Then my own prospect of Eton excludes everything but the elms and the cloisters at night, and the Delphin Classics (unread, though, for the most part, by me) in the Library gallery; wrapped together in the cold broken mist which clung, like milk, along the ground as soon as the afternoons darkened. "The very thought, you see" and it is Gray who writes, "tips my pen with poetry, and brings Eton to my view." The cruel-to-be-kind

accent of the school clock, the tinnier, less cultivated bell in the Curfew Tower; the gowns, the Holbeins, the blue drugget, the space, which attended breakfast with the Provost, the respectful comfort which made each mouthful taste historical; the oddness of knowing that to such people, and to the sisters in grey silk who kept their houses, Eton was home; the reassuring texture of ancient bricks; the excursions into a world where Ruskin is still prophet, and portfolios of almost invisibly pale water-colours (the Castle at all seasons, Carcassonne, Chartres) lie under the cretonned window-seats; Luxmoore's garden, and himself, at eighty odd, standing by the Thames, boat-hook in hand, in case I should drown, and myself, without him ever suspecting, a quarter of a mile away swimming in mid-stream; with these materials I can paint a picture of sorts, adorable to bring out in the evenings, and tinged, unchangeably, with the half-light of a winter afternoon.

At the time, however, it was not like that. There were flashes of poetry actually present to me; but they did not redeem until later the opacity of the prose. At the beginning it was all right. Food, smut, the discovery of laziness—I had never been to a private school, and arrived in consequence with notions of industry—filled a year or two quite pleasantly. But I had neither the good looks nor the enterprise to make the most of my disreputable friends; and the food, except what we bought for ourselves, was uniformly

repulsive ; and laziness ended in such a series of clashes with every authority, since I was lazy at games as well, that I soon found myself having to expend the most extraordinary industry to avoid the consequences of not being industrious. Usually unsuccessfully. I can remember being summoned to his room, at the other end of Eton, and cursed, by Mr. Peter Fleming for idleness on parade. His manner was imposing.

My last year, by contrast, was pleasant enough ; but it can hardly be said to have been spent at Eton. With half-a-dozen friends, I established contacts in Oxford and London. A Homburg hat under our overcoats, we used to hurry after boys' dinner to the railway bridge and wait until the air became loud with the noise of whatever car had been summoned, invariably a large black furious car ; and then, hidden at the feet of the Old Boy or cousin or brother, we sped off until Eton was safely behind, and Jermyn Street or the High grandly ahead.

R. used to dress in his sister's clothes and drive in an open Rolls-Royce to interview his tutor about himself. M. turned his room into a tent-room by hanging it with gold lamé. H. used to lunch at the Savoy Grill, to the embarrassment of his parents. J. and I escaped from Winchester during the cricket match, and dined in Percy Street, off the Tottenham Court Road, with a cousin who assembled for us Augustus John, Nina Hamnett, Eugene Goossens, and I forget who else. We drank too much, got back to Eton in the nick of

time, and had to describe a cricket match we had not seen to sceptical tutors, who had noticed our absence, but perhaps did not know that we longed for the moment when we could be peacefully sick. The great advantages of the Eton system are its tolerance and the privacy it allows. But so unfair are the workings of the mind that, having so much, we demanded more. Those who abused the general tolerance, like M., were mocked but not molested; and those who were merely nonconformist and bored could console themselves by the thought that elsewhere their ennui, although enlivened by martyrdom, would have been acuter. Probably a large public school has to be pretty dull; to keep up amazing pretences of what "matters" and does not "matter"; to whittle the boys rather than show them how to mould themselves. But ought I to have left Eton with the memory of one master, among dozens who stuffed us in a scholarly and kind and competent manner, who, by stimulating our own minds, made the work exciting? Should I not have learned one foreign language well enough to get beyond a paragraphic stumble through Mérimée's *Colomba*? Should the typical Etonian, apart from a handful of conscientious Viceroys, be the amiable gentleman he is, walking up his pheasants, or driving, in a demure car, to a very civilized office? The answer is, He should be; but the times are past when he can be. Anybody with a strain of comfortable weakness in his nature is likely to be incapacitated for life by six years of Eton. They

may make him the most delightful companion, they may give him a pellucid excitement on the Fourth of June; but they will give him cause to thank a sober pre-Wesley God nightly on his knees for that pleasant country home and that little allowance from father.

On *Das Siebengebirge: Malerische Ansichten*, my great-grandmother has written *July and August '57*. The innocent engravings depict groups among rocks, stretches of that most disappointing river, the Rhine, some obelisks, a ruined apse. With my camera I could take more or less the same views.

But the groups? My great-grandmother could be matched all over England to-day; on Germany the groups have scarcely left a trace.

One can toy with the idea that, although all countries offer their people reasons for deep dissatisfaction most of the time, each country passes in turn through an oasis. In 1857 most countries were unusually tolerable; but it was undoubtedly the central point in the German oasis, soon to be succeeded by Italy, which of all had the longest innings as a nice country to live in. That summer in the Siebengebirge must have been perfect. The porcelain pipes, stuffy rooms, hunting parties, genealogies, have never since been so reassuring. Perhaps because the German races become disagreeable the moment they are important, and are universally delightful in obscurity; in which they are precisely the reverse of ourselves. For example,

the Bavarians, who have never been important, have always been the pleasantest of the Reichsdeutschen. And the Austrians, for whom most of the business of an Empire was conducted by the neighbouring Magyars and Slavs, have always been pleasant except on the rare occasions when they found themselves conquerors.

In 1857, the Rhinelanders were obscure and therefore pleasant. Thirteen years later, coinciding with the invention of a German nation, the focal point of all that was implied by "Germany" to my great-grandmother, was shifted out of the German Empire for good. A little survives in Austria still. No wonder the Reichsdeutschen feel impelled either to get credit for it or to annihilate it for good. The gloomy side of the matter is that pleasant people are seldom energetic; and that the world is taking a leaf out of University books, in dividing itself into two camps: the aesthetes and the hearties. The hearties may be nasty fellows who get drunk; but the aesthetes have no weapon of self-protection except a smile.

At the sight of Sidney's *Arcadia*, which, were it not in folio, I might one day read to the end, I am carried back to 1915, to walks in the garden at Penshurst, and some vague analogy drawn by a governess between Sir Philip Sidney and my father and the Happy Warrior. With the wind the right way, we could hear a hollow booming, but the war meant very little to me except during the violent thunderstorms which during that

summer were sent, it was said, by the Germans. I used to go to the work-room of my grandmother's maid at the top of the house. It became dark and silent; I was perfectly calm, full of power, malevolent, fighting for both sides. The work-room looked two ways, north to black, east to orange and black. I have never experienced a greater sense of power than in waiting for the storm to begin. I would not look at the sewing-machine of which, in the mornings, I was so fond. The door was locked; Miss Moss could not surprise me. I paced up and down until the hissing gusts came close to the house; and the rain began to press down the glass like glycerine. Pacing up and down, I gave the signal. The thunder could begin. Thenceforward it was my war. The electricity was heroin in my veins. When the noise of the storm was at its height I knew it was safe to sing. But with the thunder quite above the house, I became quieter, for my concentration was greater. I crouched in the window, and placed the detonating clouds where I chose. I directed—and looking backward I can feel so precisely the outflow of power that I do not know yet how far I deceived myself—the rival crashes, drove in a dart there, or there; and when the noise was suddenly muffled, and the storm began to blow into the country, and I had to unlock the door, it was with the sensation of screening the fire because I wanted to sleep; or putting away, because it had exhausted me, a dangerous toy.

A Narrative of Proceedings in Venezuela in South America in the years 1819 and 1820, by George Laval Chesterton, late Captain and Judge-Advocate of the British Legion, raised for the service of the Republic of Venezuela, is not only extremely readable, but gratifying in the highest degree to two snobberies: that of little-known events, and that of little-known places. Chesterton had lively reactions to circumstances and does not boggle at what he found: which was that the thousand men under Colonel English's command—"From his extraordinary torpidity and supineness, I have often wondered how he could have summoned up sufficient resolution"—would have been better employed fighting for the Spaniards than against them. Their adventures were vivid, and their privations useless; except to give the Judge-Advocate that occasion to write a salt and fascinating book.

Scraps of knowledge emerge—the kind of scraps that makes Southey's *Commonplace Book* such excellent reading: such as that the people of Angostura fought all diseases alike by means of hot lemonade. Obscure names are used with familiarity: The Patriot General, Urdaneta; the island of Margarita, celebrated for its cotton hammocks. The reader is warmed by a pleasant feeling of petty triumph over the next man. 1820 Venezuela is in a sense pocketed.

Any South American country is a fine field for such irritating triumphs. Had Guayaquil been even more horrible than it is, I should still have been jubilant to

be the only one of my friends to have landed there. Miserable with fever in Riobamba, no medicine was more paregoric than the plain statement, *I am in Riobamba*. Ecuador had been pocketed, and not out of a book for once. Unfortunately, it is not easy to maintain that emotion for long. However various the surfaces, one place is apt to be distressingly like another. The Chola fruit-sellers, the Goanese peddlars, the Cypriote fishermen, give the eye an impression of diversity which other organs soon dispute. The stomach complains, the head aches, the body generally acquiesces or rebels without any reference to the scenery. Before long one dares not leave the hotel without a camera. For perpetually alert travelling, a book is far more vivid than one's own eyes. Especially the nineteenth century accounts, never oblique, never hypersensitive, of a journey, such as another first-rate South American book: Bates's *Naturalist's Voyage on the Amazons*; a book which has replaced any active wish to see the Amazons for myself, since what I want from them, the sense of a closed forest, of huge space, and thick water, I have. Travelling, at best, against a grey background offers moments as sharply bright as the explosion of a shell. Books such as that of Bates or Chesterton, suggest with tonic deceitfulness that remote places are, *as a rule*, interesting.

It was "In loving memory of many good meals eaten in 1926 in Touraine" that A. gave me William Caine's

Glutton's Mirror—a book which is not only funny and sensible, but adorned with drawings that are quite brilliantly funny. It recalls something more than good meals. For the autumn of 1926 I spent, like many of my contemporaries, "with a French family."

They lived, let us say, near Loches; a doctor and his wife, and they had never taken a paying guest before. I was delivered into their hands by my cousin E., who, owing to a dislike of exact hours, would not take the train from Paris, but hired a taxi off the street. We had slept in consequence, at Orleans.

Madame Desbons afterwards confided that she was glad when E. left, still in the taxi. He had arrived with a first paying-guest; a symbol if she chose to think so, of defeat. He was, and is, like a valuable bird, standing still with the coiled hovering of a bird, and ready, when necessary, to peck hard. Or, like a bird, he moves and glitters, confident and fantastic. The Desbons were anxious to reassure him about their drainage and their cooking. They wanted to know whether I would pay my own washing bills, or whether all accounts should be sent to my father. E. replied, shimmering in front of the doctor like a bee-eater, with news of Jean Cocteau and some little convoluted anecdotes of Anna de Noailles. I could see Madame Desbons watching me—I barely spoke French and dared not begin—wondering whether my twelve and sixpence a day was worth it.

But when we were alone we at once decided to like

one another. For my part, not to like Madame Desbon would have been impossible. She must have been extremely pretty, with a small upturned nose and a pretty mouth. What Time had not been able to attack was her pretty ways. Issuing, in the morning, from her yellow and mauve room—for such were her favourite colours—to direct the servants, in a lace cap and a flannel dressing-gown, their prettiness, if she caught sight of anybody, was already apparent. Later, when she was protected by a mauve powder, except for a wide unpowdered circle round each eye, they recalled an atmosphere hard to define . . . of what balls in Tours before the war? and what vanished cabarets from the great days of Montmartre? At the game of analogies she was a mother-of-pearl souvenir bowl, a satin *pouffe*, a doll's cradle re-discovered with a tender rush of recollections, a chocolate-box kept for the picture on the lid and filled with pieces of ribbon.

The doctor, on the other hand, was a loose-leaf note-book or a piece of finely-woven basket-work. His mind was subtle and various, his reading, especially in all that touched upon Proust, annoyingly wide. I exactly remember his hands covered with hair, as black and fine as though it were on a leaf; and their expressive knobby fingers. His life was spoiled by poor health into which Madame Desbons, more, I think, from her fear of standing alone than from sickness, had accompanied him. When he was well, the doctor spent most of his day fishing; and, since the house was built

literally across a river, from bank to bank, it was sometimes possible to watch him fishing from a balcony under the roof. On these days, since he felt the cold very much, his bearded figure was worth watching: for it was encased in several overcoats, and knitted shawls and spencers; and topped with not one, but two or more berets. They gave the effect of a pagoda, and all the more since his favourite beret was a rich vermillion. I sometimes suspected this exhaustless capacity for fishing a valuable pretext, for often days together yielded next to no result. When he or I were only working, or talking, Madame Desbons was likely to appear with a little start of pleasure, and chat—and chat. But fishing was known to be sacred. We could not chat, nor even walk, nor paddle the boat, remotely near that placid, ruminating figure.

Usually, however, one or both of the Desbons would be ill: not necessarily sick, but ailing. They had slept badly, caught cold on the stairs, developed a *mal aux reins*, a *mal au dos*, a gum inflammation, a humour of some kind because of the damp, or simply because of the time of year. And the central-heating, always at full blast, was stoked until I expected the needles to melt into Madame Desbons' knitting; and a coal-fire would be lit, and shawls brought, and *tisane*; and the doctor would shut himself into his room. After this had lasted a day or two, and the atmosphere of "Mon-pauvre-enfant-ça-ne-va-pas-fort" was well established, Madame Joubert would be invited. She was exactly

the woman to ask, because, as I was often told, she had suffered extensively, though not, as far as I knew, precisely. During the first weeks, it was understood that I should leave the ladies alone during the visits of Madame Joubert; but later I found that, without any intention on my part, I had become a favourite. I took Madame Joubert out of herself, it seemed; and in her absence I was drawn into discussing, with Madame Desbons, what our joint example could do for her nerves. For the great merit of Madame Joubert was that, however sickly Madame Desbons might be, she was invariably sicker.

During those discussions, I learned that the root of Madame Joubert's complaint was nostalgia. Alone in her villa on the outskirts of Amboise, she pined for Madagascar. Monsieur Joubert—a delightful, jolly old person whose constant absence on business completed her suffering—after twenty years of the tropics had sold his interest in a graphite mine, to bring his wife home. She had, said Madame Desbons, everything. In particular, a large Delage, which we all enjoyed. But she remained inconsolable for the equator. Next I was told that she might not have “everything” much longer; for the passion of Monsieur Joubert's later years was a petrol-lighter he had invented, and the launching of which, we were told, took him so often away from home. “Le briquet de Monsieur Joubert” became an object of incantation amongst us. For there was only, so far as we knew, one in the world, and that belonged

to the doctor. It was gilt and inlaid with coloured enamels; and its peculiar property was that you had only to squeeze it for the wick to catch. We followed the fortunes of this *briquet* breathlessly. Now it was about to appear on the market; now there was a hitch; now the Jouberts were facing destitution; now they would be secure for ever. There was no climax to these incidents, I believe; and I privately thought of the *briquet* as a more developed variant of the doctor's fishing. Years later, I heard that Madame Joubert's dream had been fulfilled. They had returned to Madagascar.

There was a constant stream of neighbours: among them, Mademoiselle Yolande de Malplaquet, a large and gracious spinster, whose landscapes had been publicly exhibited. She only painted, she said, in winter, because she could not manage a summer palette. I remember one afternoon, when Madame Desbons had interrupted my work, and, during the ensuing chat, dragged from me that I was writing a poem. Mademoiselle de Malplaquet was at tea, "and now," Madame Desbons suddenly said, "Alan will read you the poem he wrote this afternoon." I protested in vain. It was unfinished. It was in English. I was reminded that Mademoiselle de Malplaquet was also an artist, that she did not at all mind showing her own rough sketches. More gracious than ever, the painter bowed. She would be pleased, she said, as though granting a concession, to hear my poem. Madame Desbons broke in, "*Quoi qu'*

elle ne parle pas l'anglais, elle apprécie la musique d'une belle phrase." There was no escape. I had to read a poem, any poem—and Madame Desbons' pretty ways were never prettier than during the reading—autograph a typescript, any typescript, and present it. Mademoiselle de Malplaquet tied it carefully away in her portfolio. Her mother, Madame de Malplaquet, of whom I have written elsewhere, was the doctor's only patient since his retirement, and died, not unexpectedly, at about this time, of over-eating.

To someone who had never lived out of England before, these people probably seemed more singular than they were. For their oddities were only the first thing to catch my eye. They were all exceedingly kind to me, and the autumn of that year was one of the happiest times of my life.

A., who was with a neighbouring family, and I, used to explore the country, garnering, meanwhile, those memorable meals. By Christmas the *Guide Bleu* and the Michelin map of all the country from Blois to Angers were torn and sticky. The poplars that year seemed unusually golden, and the calm dusty autumn prolonged, for all the time we chose to take preposterous local trains which ran on poppies and crushed the encroaching corn as they crept by; to climb into the towers of one hardly accessible ruin after another; or bicycle through the reverberating woods—for *la chasse* was open, and even the doctor, for a week, forgot to fish—to tennis and tea.

Suddenly, it was whole-heartedly winter; and we were getting up at six in the morning on All Saints' Day at Villandry to drive to Solesmes for the singing. It had frozen hard in the night, and the day was only glimmering when we drove out. The moat was frozen over, and the house had turned into something entirely fabulous: an enormous dark silver box, lit, here and there, under the arcades along a wide court, and in the windows above, by lantern and candle in velvet splashes of yellow, already fighting a losing battle with the blue of the morning. The silver trees, and the terraces over the moat, were sparkling dully in mist. I found myself living inside a prism, or on some cold palatial star.

Until it became too wintry, I used to sit in a small kiosque beside the river to work and read. The Desbons' garden was built upon several islands, and the kiosque stood upon the farthest. From it, I could see the full width of the stream unite again, and drift, with the most perfect tranquillity, away from the just-audible sluices of a mill behind the house. I read Gide, with a mournful little dog beside me, a foundling whom the Desbons, who knew that English names were fashionable, had christened out of a dictionary, Muddy. I read Gide with a sense of becoming reverence; but I never was able quite to capture the excitement I hoped for. So much was so good; and yet the general effect so unexpectedly tiny. *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. Why are they not more

impressive? Why is it difficult to be sympathetic to the effect they made upon their time, when one measures it in the letters of sensible people like Jacques Rivière and Alain-Fournier? Perhaps because even when they most powerfully affect the mind they have little power of leverage. Once more to play the game of analogies, there is too much in Gide of mittens.

Within sight of this kiosque were the ruins of a *château fort*; and upon it the branch lines of my activities in Touraine converge: the books, the peace, the gluttony, the odd neighbours. None of them was as odd as the American war-invalid who owned the chateau. I knew very little about him, except what the Desbons, with popping eyes, told me; and that amounted to some story of a faithless wife, and a flight from the world. He had kept for himself a very small income, had bought the ruins, and been busy, since the war, restoring them with his own hands. He lived the life of a peasant; he was his own architect, his own mason. He taught himself to execute Renaissance plaster ceilings, to fresco the walls appropriately. He dug his vines, dressed as a peasant, or carved initials in stone for the face of a tower. He was a gardener, and a carter, and a cook. He was a collector: of furniture, bindings, wine, recipes, women, books. He did not like anybody much or consistently; and he enjoyed upsetting the trivial people of the surrounding châteaux by the vigour of his conversation. He ate prodigiously; and so, whenever I was invited, did I, for it would hardly be

possible to offer a guest more sumptuously delicious food. He would ask one without looking at one, as if to accept were dangerous; and he would deprecate the dinner in advance. It was to be peasant's food and very little of it. But I knew that every spare moment of his day was spent in the most alembicated preparations; and the result never failed. The doctor and Madame Desbons and I used to get home as best we could, assuring each other that it was the most natural thing in the world to stumble on the hillside; and in the morning there was no suggestion of indefinable ailing or nervous disorder; we were simply ill.

By day, there was another reason to visit the ruins. They commanded all the surrounding country; they looked across to a low range of hills on which the pepper-pot turrets of the neighbours pricked through the trees; they hung directly above the autumn woods where Mademoiselle de Malplaquet was at work; and the punt where the doctor was sitting; and all the friendly uneventful valley across the river. I used to sit there, looking across that view, which might serve as a definition of Country, and knowing, in my gratitude, that it was somewhere in that landscape, and there alone, that I should make my home. Since then I have experienced exactly the same sensation in at least ten other countries. Nevertheless, my last visit to the ruins was a sad one. I had greatly enjoyed my autumn. I had also learned a good deal. But not, by some oversight, French.

Only to look at *The Poetical Works of John Langhorne*, D.D., makes me feel truant. When I was at Oxford, and wanted to go to London twice a week, and to lectures never at all, I saw that I should have to find an exceptional pretext. It would have to be a creditable pretext, if possible scholarly, and if scholarly —since I did not want embarrassing questions —obscure. I therefore hit upon the project of an edition of Langhorne. I was reasonably certain that neither Sir Herbert Warren, nor the Professor of Poetry himself, had ever read a line of him; certain, too, that they would know his name well enough to keep their ignorance to themselves. And so it was. "Yes, of course," they said, "Langhorne." And thenceforward the dons assumed, neither accurately nor for long, that my absences were spent in the London Library.

There is no other reason that I know of to associate Langhorne with amusement. He wrote, in a *Hymn to Hope*, one of the worst couplets in English:

O come! and to my pensive eye
Thy far-foreseeing tube apply.

And he wrote a great deal of toothless, passable verse, slightly above the dead level of the mid-eighteenth century. There are moments, even, of energy in *The Country Justice* and elsewhere. Not enough to justify a new edition, I thought to myself.

On purpose, I have not re-read *Phantastes*, for fear it

should turn out to be what George Macdonald has labelled it, a Faerie Romance, and not the fairy story I remember it. It was given me when I was eleven or so, along with a pocket Dante; and although the one has not yet been opened, the other, even years later, left such an impression that I still looked apprehensively at the Ash and the Alder. I do not doubt that there is a good deal of fusty writing in it, but *Phantastes* must have a certain vigour if I can breathe even now, faintly, the magical atmosphere.

I was taken to tea at an Elizabethan house in Surrey. It was an exceedingly beautiful house; but the chief thing I remember of it is the masses of lilies in a long green-panelled room, out of which opened similar smaller rooms, drenched in the smell of lilies. I heard an old lady rustling through them, who came to greet my grandmother and me. She was dressed in grey silk, and yet she was utterly unlike the usual old lady in grey, who peers out of her respectable paraplegia on the screen or in a novel, with such intoxicating senility. She moved, yes, with a rustle; but decisively. She told us that she was taking up her Italian again, for the sake of Dante—and it was now that I got my first present, in so many minute rebellious volumes that a shy child found it hard to be grateful. She spoke to us in English, Italian and French; and while she spoke her head kept nodding, under a weight which was partly of eighty years and partly emphatic.

The windows were open to an ancient sunny lawn

and the lilies poured sleepily over the sharp scent of methylated spirit when the wick was lit for tea.

I used to see her in South Audley Street, later, where she had another house, but no less full of lilies. The chairs were covered in glazed chintz, and upon them sat, occasionally, other old ladies. None, however, rustled so brilliantly when they moved, and none had such a thin, positive face, like the face on a medal. Had she been rather snobbish? rather a blue-stocking? Probably; but by this time she was the face on a medal. I was given other books, and when I was at school, five-pound notes out of a little drawer.

When she died the house was empty for a long time, and the stucco pillars became so black that the black IX on them almost vanished. Then it was bought, I believe by a celebrated Paris dressmaker. I can imagine the redecoration, the pickling, the inevitable white room, the white leather sofa on a landing, the Tchelitshew and the Dali, the new banisters (gilt leopards? Austrian baroque?), and the cigarette-boxes in mirror-glass by the beds. Delightful: but different.

Very few spectacles are more pleasing than that of a popular Anglo-Saxon critic—the kind of critic who declares, in the Sunday papers, what the novelists or the playwrights or the cinema people of the week have been worth—deliriously shocked by a discovery which is usually phrased: “I am horrified to find myself going highbrow.” Every one almost—the last to catch my eye

was Mr. Agate—has at one time or another thrown out this warning to Tulse Hill to take cover; and on almost every occasion the word “highbrow” has been used, not with the Fowler implications (“*Highbrow—See Mugwump*”); but with the C.O.D. (“*Highbrow, (person) of detached intellectual views*”). For the horror turns out, in a subsequent paragraph, to have been that the critic has preferred: not, after an opening of the heavens, *The Cherry Orchard* intrinsically to *Jill Darling!* but something good on a high shelf to something bad on a low one. And therefore the Take Cover was all his fun, because, of course, being a critic, he, etc., etc.

I think thus with Shenstone’s *Essays on Men and Manners* beside me. And I wonder why the Anglo-Saxons have lately become so conscious of their brains, so anxious to appear subnormal whatever their real capacity. Why are the austere highbrows, Fowler or otherwise, transported by P. G. Wodehouse and the latest detective story; over which quite humble brains are only amused? Why does the statement “He is young, and very intelligent” suggest either a person of means, inverted, who corresponds with Berlin Communists on the run and is seldom in England; or a poorer fellow, normal, and haunted by dreams; or a friendly, capable fellow, who hopes he will not be asked to speak of what interests him except on chosen occasions late at night?

When somebody has the courage to go about, as it were, unmasked, the passers-by are likely to be cross,

or frightened, or both. It is not long since a sort of terror was spread at the very name of "the Sitwells," and Eliot was talked of as an intellectual Jack-the-Ripper. Their fault, to conventional eyes, was that they called attention to themselves; they wrote as they felt, and pleased some of the poets. But since those days the wind has changed again. The artist is expected to be loyal not only to himself but to the Party. It will be curious to see, in the ranks of the Extreme Left—from which all the monitors have been elected this term—that forgotten figure, the Revolutionary. But a revolutionary squared; imperilling his reputation for the right to revolt from the Revolution.

With that in mind: that, granted the courage to admit "detached intellectual views," the highbrow is expected to feel ashamed of not attaching them immediately to one wing or the other—even the Right, it is felt, is better than an indifferent Centre—with that in mind, it is hard not to feel a little envious of Halesowen. Even of the pleasant Quaker society of Amwell. At this distance the peaceful independence of an intelligent country life, at a time when the acceptance of all these conditions: peace, independence, and intelligence, needed no apology, seems more desirable than it can, in fact, have been. Shenstone, at any rate, was not satisfied. "Poor man!" says Gray. "He was always wishing for money, for fame, and other distinctions." Yet to us he is a delightful figure, a sometimes exquisite poet, living in a landscape garden on

whose paths walked the “two or three neighbouring clergymen who wrote verses too,” the distinguished visitors from Hagley, Lady Luxborough, and the rest. It is odd to see such a mild prescription for curing that disease fashionable then and—after lying dormant for over a century—now: the spleen.

Composing a vista, setting up an inscription, deciding after conversation with Lady Luxborough and the clergymen that “Urns are more solemn, if large and plain; more beautiful, if less and ornamented”—very small beer, all of it, and yet no less fruitful than the attempts I hear round me, to blanket the same spleen in a social conscience.

While on the subject of Shenstone’s inscriptions: under that title he produced an excellent “Piece of Humour,” too little known among amateurs of the mildly rude:

To the memory
of A. L. Esquire

Justice of the peace for this County:
Who, in the whole course of his pilgrimage
Through a trifling ridiculous world,
Maintaining his proper dignity,
Notwithstanding the scoffs of ill-dispos’d persons,
And wits of the age,
That ridicul’d his behaviour,
Or censur’d his breeding;
Following the dictates of nature,
Desiring to ease the afflicted

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Or censur’d his breeding;
Following the dictates of nature,
Desiring to ease the afflicted

Eager to set the prisoners at liberty,
Without having for his end
The noise or report such things generally cause
In the world,
(As he was seen to perform them of none)
But the sole relief and happiness
of the party in distress;
Himself resting easy,
When he could render that so;
Not griping, or pinching himself,
To hoard up superfluities . . .
Always bestowing more than he was asked,
Always imparting before he was desired;
And so up to the point. It is worth reading in its
entirety, as an example of writing *crescendo*.

It is not easy to believe that the *surréalistes*, when they claim Edward Young for a forerunner, can have read him. They would do better to stick to the still more inflated author of the *Chants de Maldoror*. The *Night Thoughts* are nothing if not realist. If they blaze for a moment their fire is neither warmer nor more volatile than the stone flames of the grenade on a monument; whereas Maldoror spits and runs like burning oil.

The Comte de Lautréamont, or Isidore Ducasse, as he in fact was called, has excited no interest whatever in England. I scarcely recall seeing his name in English print. In France, however, his reputation as an influence on modern poetry is second only to the very

first of his contemporaries: Rimbaud or Laforgue or Mallarmé; though his personal affinities are, if to anybody, to Rimbaud alone. And he is a perhaps unique example of posthumous fame. Even Hopkins was always known to a small circle. From his death in 1870, in the early twenties, until fifteen years ago, Lautréamont was a name without an echo.

I have sometimes played with the idea of an essay upon the theory that modern poetry owes half its shape and texture to the city of Montevideo. Modern French poetry in any case. Lautréamont comes from Montevideo, Laforgue comes from Montevideo; so does Jules Supervielle, the fine poet of *Gravitations*. And out of the first two come in turn the lemonish force, and the rambling nostalgia, which modern poets of all countries have borrowed from the French.

There is no tidy explanation for the existence of poets in Montevideo. If the landscape mattered, they should be born farther north, in Brazil, or inland, upon the Pampas. Montevideo has not even much charm. At night perhaps, by the Parque Rodo, when the lightning stalks deliberately in from the sea, not in flashes, but in a bright perpetual droop like the strands of a flaming net; or just before dawn, when the roundabouts and shooting-booths are still lit, and the couples lean over a balustrade above the beach as if it were mid-afternoon; but by day, no. The rectangular street-blocks, and the clerks in flannelette pyjamas do not

inspire; although to the credit side must be set really excellent wine and a great variety of bars: sanded, plain, crazy, geometrical, or murderous. Montevideo seems to have no roots in the country of which it is the capital; it has outgrown the state it represents. It can have little in common with the Montevideo of 1846 into which, during the third year of an eight years' siege, Lautréamont was born. He came to France in the early '60s to study at Tarbes, whither, by an extraordinary coincidence, Laforgue came a decade later. He lived in Paris, disappeared a few years afterwards, perhaps "removed" by the police for revolutionary activities; perhaps not. He simply disappears. His parents were rich, and there is no certainty that he ever was in want. Yet he evidently was dissatisfied with his estate. Like another literary eccentric, he had to ennoble himself. He was able to quiet the rage of Isidore Ducasse against the universe by a fairy-story which, for the first representative of *surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, seems oddly reactionary; by calling himself le comte de Lautréamont.

In the same way that jokes often seem much funnier in a foreign language simply because they are seen, so to speak, through a fresh lens, certain aspects of literature are impressive to us only because they are not in English. I cannot see any English person ever reading Lautréamont with a first-hand emotion of pleasure; the only pleasure we can extract from him is that of recognition, of comparison, and deduction.

The voice is absolutely the voice of Cain, the rush and clamour of the style strike too shrilly. There is no burking the fact that after a page or two, Maldoror becomes a bore. And yet, how bitterly exciting the noise, how precisely queer the images. Just as one knows by instinct when people truthfully recount their dreams, however fantastic (and when they lie), I know that with Lautréamont *it was so*. How provoking, then, that he should be much easier to admire than to read.

Incompactness is out of tune with the times. "O poulpe," Maldoror exclaims, "O poulpe au regard de soie! toi, dont l'âme est inséparable de la mienne; toi le plus beau des habitants du globe terrestre!" and in the wavering harsh phrases throughout there is something squeegee-like. They cling where they can; with that vagueness of grip which is exactly the quality in poetry we have come to think shocking.

There are books, and not only books, all round the room and the house, which evoke my grandmother. None of them, however, bring her to my mind so strongly as a battered copy of *The Coral Island* which, after she had read it with keen excitement herself, she secretly caused her maid to hide on top of a wardrobe until I was older. For a moment I see her exactly, and then a fog interferes again, for I was thirteen when she died; and the clear picture flickers into a blur, even at those almost frightening moments of recall when a

visiting card falls out of a drawer or the postman leaves an Army and Navy Stores catalogue still addressed to "Lady Victoria Dawnay."

Children have no idea what old relations are like. For one thing, all grown-up people, to them, are static; for another, relations are anyway seen from a fictive angle. The child, almost conscious of his own fluidity, is inventing them as he goes on: the immovable, apparently familiar, grown-ups about whom he flows. He has to deduce them from their eyes and their voices, from the circumstantial evidence of their movements; and he only troubles to do so by fits and starts, and as a consequence of his interest in himself.

What I remember of my grandmother, therefore, may not be what there was for the other grown-ups to see. For instance, I know that she had, even when she was old, a very beautiful skin; but I can remember telling her, "Your cheeks are like a map," and then reversing the simile in my own mind until I had an impression of her, not as she visibly was, but hatched with imaginary lines. She used a particular face-powder I remember, which came in yellow satin boxes, fastened with an ivory pin. I thought them very beautiful, and when they were empty, I filled them with shells, which kept for years a faint oatmeal dust on their pallor, and a dusty indeclinable smell.

I do not remember very much of Beningbrough, where she lived when I was small. There was a musical-box in the drawing-room, with changeable

prickly cylinders, and there was an instrument called the Cecilian, which fitted a piano key-board, and thumped out the *Rosen aus dem Süden* waltz and *Funiculi Funicula*. At Benningbrough the regnant nanny of a long procession took me to a fountain in the garden, opened the little iron slot in the ground where the water was turned on, and, when a family of frogs jumped out, squashed them one by one under her flat nanny's heel. I should like to think that I developed a taste for music; for the architect, Hawksmoor; for brown, unfrequented libraries; for the hounds in full cry across the park; from this period. But I was more impressed by Miss Snell and the frogs. Though again my grandmother moves against that summer in some way connected with a little panelled dressing-room, and an early morning, a silver-gilt tea-pot, and a paper-knife with a handle of mauve quartz.

She only became distinct to me later, in London; when we were together until the end of the war, at first at her house on the corner of Belgrave Square, and later in the country. It was then that I realized the importance a corner house has in the eyes of a nanny. For there was something shameful about my grandmother's house. It was a corner house all right but it was the corner house of West Halkin Street; and the true corner house of the square lay between; in its own garden. Our side-windows (two lavatories, I think) overlooked the square; by all rights we should have been the corner house of the square; but Lord

Bathurst had robbed us of our rights. And like Lord Pirrie on the next corner he offered the final challenge to a nanny's envy. His house was more than a corner house. It stood alone.

In consequence we had no square key. But my grandmother was quick to remedy this. In August when our cousins at Number Eleven were away in the country, their key was taken and copied. For, after all, our side windows overlook the square, my grandmother said.

I saw that she never missed an opportunity of living more intensely, often almost unscrupulously. It was, for example, her habit, when she liked the exterior of a country house, to drive boldly up and, in the last resort, appeal to the butler's sentimentality. "If I could just hurry round the rooms," she would ask in her soft voice. "You see, I was born here." I have heard a typical story of her arriving late to luncheon with her brother Albert Grey, because of an appalling hansom accident which happened in front of her eyes. She described the ruins. It was horrible, she said. Then, with the greatest innocence in the world, "But if it *had* to happen, it was so lucky I was there to see." She was an excellent forger: and there were various stories of the confusion she had thus introduced, of course when she was very young (I was assured), into the lives of her friends: by means of the pretty envelopes, perhaps, which still turn up occasionally, carefully illuminated in water-colour; or directed

in verse; or contrived so that the stamp was held in a bird's beak.

My grandmother was a typical member of an accomplished generation. She drew, did delicate stumpp-work, painted, sang: all as a matter of course rather than with enthusiasm. That is to say, she drew for a record of travelling, sang glees after dinner, and painted intricate scenes round tiny photographic heads. French and German governesses had left their mark; she was brought up to be sensitive and liberal; and the actual course of her life, though she was less prominently upon the stage of her time than her sisters or her brother, kept her in constant touch with the actors. They stayed at Benningbrough, they dined at Charles Street. During the war they came in tall cars with a luggage-rail round the roof; even in broughams. And I was dressed in green velvet to receive them, or made, on exceptionally disagreeable occasions, to play to them on the piano. After a time both my mother and my grandmother forgot that I was a child. The last dynasty of nannies ended, as usual, in a row; nobody remembered to engage a governess, and I suddenly found myself an equal member of the household. I abused my position by turning strongly pro-German, and cheering, perhaps alone in all London, the German victories.

Like little pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope, fragments of that time flick into space, but not enough to form a pattern: the drawing-room, with its Greuze and its

had lost some of its comforting this-worldliness by being so old.

We moved to a second house, not far away. It had belonged to an admiral and he had rebuilt the roof to look like a top deck. The flues were turned into two enormous yellow funnels, and there was a pair of deck-houses, with a view to the Isle of Wight, connected by a narrow quarter-deck. It was very stuffy inside them, and under their leather cushions lived innumerable sleepy flies. When it rained my mother and I used to sit there gloomily and eat chocolates from Christchurch which tasted of shampoo. But my grandmother never seemed to be gloomy. She wrote letters—the war did not interrupt her correspondence with an old governess in Hanover—and once there was the scare of a German submarine in the bay, which she greatly enjoyed.

My mother was ill, and my grandmother and I were a good deal together. Even after the war, when we lived in different houses again, I was often with her. She took me for my first ride in a bus, for all of my nannies, who differed in everything, were at one on two points: that buses and park seats (but not the penny chairs) were full of disease. She took me with her alone to the country on what I long thought the happiest fortnight of my life. There was my grandmother, her sister (my great-aunt Louisa) and me. I do not think it ever occurred to me that I was not the same age as they. I imagined that I too remembered

Osborne Cottage, and the Bestwood Ball, and skating in Canada; I was ready to plunge into an intricate private language, which accused one of being "rather Sir Giles" or of not being "Roman"; and I must have exasperated a large circle of neighbours, to whose houses my grandmother took me. I perfectly well remember—it was at the time of the Peace Treaty—walking round the garden at Buckhurst with the Ambassador to Rome, and scarcely pausing for breath. When I was by myself I lived in an unreal world; for there was a wood beyond the garden, and I had been given a story by Novalis, which that year peopled all woods for me.

In this piece of the actual world my grandmother was perfectly at home. To be fully herself, she needed friends and recollections round her and, not too far away, London. I know, from those who saw her fully as she was and not from my narrow angle only, that it is rare for someone of such grace, such fastidiousness, to be such fun to be with. As a rather prim but very ordinary little boy, I enjoyed consciously every hour I spent with her; but most of all during the last years of her life, when she was in a countryside as familiar as, long before, it had been happy. Not that she lived in the past. She lived exactly as one should, with the past at hand to add point of depth, but never to obscure. Now, our abstention from coffee having failed to stop the war, she was reviving family prayers; now ordering an alpaca coat and skirt, on principle, for the summer;

now preferring, in secret rebellion at the very end of her life, the penny bus to the electric brougham which was given her; now re-discovering the Coburg Box, a nest of little drawers, in which were a prismatic beetle, a gilt chair and a Cinderella's coach given at a children's ball at Frogmore in the late 'fifties, an ivory needle-case, a necklace of azure Zulu beads, Napoleon's Book of Fate, three pearls in a screw of paper, a silver skewer for eating cherries, and I forget what other treasures: upon which she smiled, not because they moved her, but because I was smiling. Whatever she did, even if it were only buying a hat, she set an example of how to grow old. And to me she gave, as well as a great deal of happiness, the sense of continuity which is precisely what old relations generally fail to give. I saw one of my most vivid friends going to Chislehurst physically to call on an otherwise-unreal page of French history; I heard the most amusing stories about the extravagant, or brilliant, or disgraceful, behaviour, in the past of visitors who seemed all equally benign and equally decrepit. Somebody who not merely brushed against, but directly imbued, my own life, could give life, when she told me about them, to the bloodless figures in the last chapters of my history-book. If these become real, I thought, so can the earlier chapters. And I became feebly conscious that, instead of being, with all my familiars, a quiet lake, I was part of a hurrying stream. Her death coincided with a new life for me. A week

or two after she died, I went to Eton. In missing my home I missed her the more bitterly. I wanted never to take off some article of clothing I had put on in my own room. Since we had hip-baths at my tutor's, that was possible; and I wore my socks for ten days and ten nights, till I was crippled with chilblains. They were thick socks of Shetland wool, I remember, and I used to look at them in the evenings with emotion.

Little by little the novelist's charting of humanity goes on. It argues against the perspicuity of modern readers that whereas the "great" novelists never offered a blue-print of their characters, but showed each of them recognizably in action and allowed their readers to deduce the complement, we have come to expect all the work done for us, even though that leave no space for action. Unfortunately, such charting leads to painful discoveries. The blue-prints reveal not only the proportion of the rooms, but the extent and the run of the drains. And the novelist finds himself up against one of the guiding cults of English life: the cult of the Innocuous.

When a bishop re-opens the Cesspool charge, and the daily papers are full of reboant but confusing letters, one fact emerges: that the majority of vocal readers do not divide books into the good and the bad, but into those which do harm and those which do not. "It does no harm" has even become a positive qualification, and not only of books. Sullivan does no harm; he

is therefore one of the corner-stones of English music. The Poet Laureate did no harm, and he was elected poet laureate. A glance round the leaders of public life, the chairmen of important undertakings, the representatives of the people, the interpreters of the law, secular and ecclesiastical, is immediately reassuring. They do no harm.

If there were any likelihood of their having read it, I should not care to be caught by any of these excellent people with a copy of Marcel Jouhandeau's *Monsieur Godeau Marié* about me. It is a book capable of doing enormous harm. I would as soon give it to some of my friends as I would give a bomb. And it is simply an account, told in the first person, of a marriage which could never have succeeded. It is a very precisely drawn blue-print, among blue-prints a masterpiece.

I think it was E. F. Benson who said that every generation wants to be moved in its particular way by its books, and that what the present generation wants of books is to be bored by them. For whatever reason, the *Innocuous* is having a fine run. Especially the *Innocuous* with pretensions: the little book, written with beauty on the leash, upon the trials of the otter, the migrations of the grasshopper, or a poacher's vicissitudes. To turn from a pile of this stuff to Jouhandeau is like finding a pin in a plump, but apparently empty, pin-cushion. He points a direction, too (though only one) for the time when English novels

are again expected not to bore: for his manner is to evacuate, with the maximum of completeness and exactitude, what takes place in a certain field of emotion. The novel ends because the author has created a vacuum.

In spite of a disastrous "form of prose, which Mr. Barker has invented" (according to the dust-cover)—the stamp of which is a sentence such as : *For the preservation of that form of inestimable charm, which lies quietly upon morbidity, I dismiss for the first time I fear the egotistical cogitations which have engendered our already manifest separation*—in spite of this, Mr. George Barker in *Janus* has nearly managed, alone in England, to make a similar impression. In an innocuous season he has taken up from the same angle what Gide notes as: "*Belle fonction à assumer : celle d'inquisiteur.*"

Here is Mr. Hollis's *Dr. Johnson*, on which I wrote my first review, for the *London Mercury*. The review tumbles out of the book, and goes back, with useless cowardice, unread.

For the *London Mercury*. . . . That opens the flood-gates. I had got the job of Assistant-Editor, at a place where few jobs can be offered or taken: the barber's shop of the National Liberal Club. And the atmosphere of fantasy in which my life on the *Mercury* began was well sustained.

It was rather odd, Jack, you must admit. Now that you are Editor no longer you can afford to look with

wonder, as well as pride, on your creation. To begin with, the office, that crazy sixteenth-century office in the Strand. Do you remember when you thought of living on the top floor? That would have given the final touch. We were all at sea anyway, and you on the top would have been the re-incarnation of Noah.

We shared the same room. In the corner was an immense glass case, heaped with books and so dusty that the glass was totally opaque. "Put it on the duck," you used to shout, when you wanted to keep a book on one side, and Grace would add it to the heap. For a long time I thought 'duck' was a technicality, like 'galley' or 'case.' I was proud to think that in my own home I, too, had a duck. One day the glass broke under the weight, and disclosed a blackened, mothy, spectral bird inside. In fact, the duck. "I bought it at a sale," you said, without looking up.

There used to be dark days in that room, when Grace would warn me, while I was hanging up my hat, "Jack's going through the manuscripts." She had been through them already, and so had I; and Robert had added a sub-acid Walpolean comment, very often simply "Pooh" or "Fie!" to the envelope. Then you gave the final verdict. Dreadful rubbish remained, so to speak, grinning, for months; but the good stuff had an extraordinary knack of disappearing. Do you remember Belloc's *Belinda*, lost in the office for five years, or was it eight? Lost to the paper, anyway, for

good. And the, to me, more painful incident of Shanks's essay on Poe? You had told me what store the author set by it, and how pleased you were that we were to publish it: the quintessence of a full book on Poe, the rare distillation of months of work. I was given the manuscript, and, in that microscopic handwriting, a considerable piece of prose had the dimension, of a note. I left it in a taxi. The author had no copy. I have not forgotten going round to the Savage Club to explain, rejecting alternative lies on the way.

It was not often I arrived at the office before you, but when I did, it always seemed extraordinary to me that you got in at all. You often paused to look at the shop next door, which went bankrupt once a week, and sold everything in a year from Japanese incense to Arts and Crafts. And meanwhile the old flower-woman had waylaid you, and a friend or two, and editors, and creditors; while upstairs the telephone rang, and Grace was saying firmly to Mr. Baldwin, or the secretary of Rosslyn Park Football Club, or an eminent visiting Ceylonese, "The Editor is in the pub"; and I was trying to entertain nature poets who were unhappy already in the unfamiliar surroundings of the Strand, and indignant poets out for cash; and Robert in a back room was trying to fetch a wicket-keeper out of the air for your inaccessible match on the same afternoon.

When you walked in, it was the same. A fitter from Burton, the tailor, was trying to measure you, your

copy wasn't done for the *Observer*, the Ceylonese gentleman insisted, Stonehenge needed preserving exactly then, each player in the cricket-match wanted detailed instructions, could you lunch on Friday instead of Tuesday at White Lodge, and could you (Mr. Pink shouted through the door) hurry up with the proofs. Then you would suddenly sit down and open a drawer full of dusty fluff, and find a forgotten treasure: nothing more, perhaps, than an old Christmas card. Everybody would be sent to glory, and we began to talk as though we were sitting over the fire after dinner, in the country. The real work would be done later, panic-stricken, in the pub; but it would be done, however unlikely that seemed.

For a young man, it was the ideal office. Anything might happen. The page-proofs of *Ulysses* turned up one day in a cupboard, with a lacuna of considerable size, to show where your indignation had boiled over. Another day a woman recalled to me, as though she were speaking of a week ago, that our last meeting had been in a boat with Piero della Francesca. Like jostling sparrows round a kindly hand, my contemporaries used to ask for you shyly; but the eagles came too, and even a few almost mythological birds (to me) like Bridges and Hardy. Do you remember the unfortunate luncheon with Bridges when I said, because I meant it, but aloud because I was sure he would agree, that it was time philanthropic Americans endowed the humanities as a change from biology and physics?

You might have warned me that Dr. Bridges was, in the plainest meaning of the word, a doctor.

I don't quite know why I write of those trivialities as though they happened in the dark ages; for some reason they seem far more than seven years old. The *Mercury* has become more punctual, I believe, and more prosperous; but the fact that you have left it justifies a faint obituary note in our voices. It gives me the chance of saying in public—and I wish it were with more grace—how pleasantly aware I am of my debts to you; and how I should like us again to go to the Librarians' Congress in Blackpool, eat oysters singly on the front, and discover 1884 Chateau Latour—it still has to serve as my one wine story—at 3s. 6d. a bottle in the hotel; await, breathless, when our visitors left the office *nobilmente*, the almost inevitable heavy fall in the dark by the broken banister; and the rest of it.

It is a pity that the great period of African exploration should have coincided with a period in which Europe was, as a whole, aware of a sense of duty. Had the continents only been exploited in the reverse order, the Jesuit cities of Paraguay built beside Victoria Nyanza, the corrugated-iron bungalows of Central Africa left to the all-devouring Chaco. Incidentally, what world-commotions would have been spared!

When Speke reaches the Ripon Falls, he records in his *Journal*:

This day also I spent watching the fish flying at the falls, and felt as if I only wanted a wife and family, garden and yacht, rifle and rod, to make me happy here for life, so charming was the place. What a place, I thought to myself, this would be for missionaries! They never could fear starvation, the land is so rich; and if farming were introduced by them, they might have hundreds of pupils.

I need say no more.

Why does that quite sensible remark from so plain and sensible a man, sound such disquieting overtones? Only because it indicates a lack of sensibility? It is the voice, at times almost unbelievable, of Duty, the voice which says elsewhere in the Journal:

Great forbearance, occasionally tintured with a little fatherly severity, is, I believe, the best dose for him (i.e. the negro); for he says to his master, in the most childish manner, after sinning, "You ought to forgive and forget; for are you not a big man who should be above harbouring spite, though for a moment you may be angry? Flog me if you like, but don't keep count against me, else I shall run away; and what will you do then?"

"Fatherly"; there is the clue. Africa is only beginning to recover from the fatherly intentions of Mr. Fairchild, helped by Mrs. Crabtree, towards his black children.

I do not know of any evocative English book on Central Africa. A sense of duty has effectively subdued any feeling of acquiescence among those I have read. And this at least gives one the pleasure of making one's own discoveries. One day the car in which B. and I were motoring from Masindi to Kitgum broke down near Lake Kioga. The rains were early that year, and already, in March, it was soaking. Near Masindi the people waded through scarlet mud, the women in wringing wet nightgowns of flame-coloured sateen. And then the bush thickened, and it began to drizzle only, and we were quite alone. I used our break-down to wander away by myself. The bush cut off any kind of a view, except a scrubby hill-side, steamy with warm rain. There had been a fire in that country, and my stockings were soon blackened by charred reeds. But since the fire new trees had sprung up, brightened by the rain into a piercing and sulphury green-ness, as precocious, wet as they were, as the cracker-papers which, in water, become flowers. On the black ground were petals in heaps where they had been shaken off by the rain; and there was total silence except for a bird which ground out two notes, like the cheap musical mill in a toyshop. Nearer the road lay a patch of deserted cotton. Then the smoky edge of a cloud brushed the top of the hill and the mist began to close one up in a damp box. I only had time to be a tourist, to say, "I am in Africa," but to acquiesce. Since then I search, but in vain, for

the acquiescent book of somebody who is more than a tourist.

The sight of *Leviathan* on the shelf (where it lies in the most absolute retirement) recalls the eminent headmaster whose reminiscences were in the paper on Sunday. The opening words of *Leviathan* could so easily stand for the motto of a conscientious headmaster such as I knew this one to be. They give at once an air of candid endeavour, of scope, of symmetry: "Concerning the thoughts of man, I will consider them first *Singly*, and afterwards in *Trayne*, or dependance upon one another." Thus Hobbes, or any synthetist (as I take headmasters to be), assumes the gown.

There, they say, are the single thoughts of man; we will tell you to what the Trayne leads. Then they tell us, variously, but with decision.

I could, anybody could, have named a better headmaster than that one. In the world of reality (to which a public school cannot be said to belong) everyone could, in conjunction with those whose opinion he trusts, name men better able to assume public responsibilities than those in power. But they would be chosen *because* there was no chance of their being able to prove their abilities; my elect headmaster would be more enlightened and lovable in every way, perhaps, than the actual one; but if I chose him I knew he was not in the running for the job.

In everything which depends on human behaviour,

the facts and the concepts are usually out of step. Laws, which, after all, are only a tabloid means of formalizing majorities, seldom prove universal in action. That is why it is legitimate to distrust the Community—"that comfortable word"*—and its derivative, Communism; the Leader, and his derivative, the Led; and any other teacher as well, who professes to be able to make any general statement about mankind, except that it is a sum of chaotic, well-intentioned; contradictory, foolish, generally mis-informed, credulous, sometimes criminal, sometimes brilliant, individuals: a sum which cannot, even when dignified with the name of the community, be greater than the sum of its component parts.

I can never understand why it should worry men like Hobbes so greatly, to admit the irrationality of man. Why invent Man at all? Man exists in the eyes of God alone. To an Englishman, Man is an exclusive being who dwells between the fiftieth and sixtieth parallels. He does not include the Mundurucus. Far less, to the Mundurucus, does he include the English.

The anthologists, those library narks, have given away most of the facts whose obscurity was half their charm. It is hard to find a quarto so dim that it yet yields a prize. For years the gaff has been blown on Christopher Anstey; but, since anthologists do not take more trouble than they must, only on *The New Bath Guide*.

* Norman Douglas.

How about the really amusing *Patriot*, written with the “moral object” of degrading “the vulgar and savage habit of prize-fighting”:

His clatt’ring cheeks and temples sounded;
While you with frequent fist assail’d him
With chuckers in the mazzard nail’d him,
And clicks upon the muns regail’d him;
Nor’ didst thou not amuse with leggers,
Cross buttocks, flying mares, and peggars,
Fall with your elbows in the bellows,
Scatter the grinders, close the smellers,
Darken the day-lights!—Muse, be brief—
You saw the store-room of the chief
Surrender its election beef,
Reluctant dumpling, beer, and gravy,
And heard each groaning bowel cry—*peccavi*.

And the more amusing *Appendix*? Anstey uses his grandest manner on trifles; he shakes together rattling slap-dash verses and a slyer classical diction, so as to deflate from either angle the inflated. He must have had a good deal of fun, on the quiet, out of Lady Miller’s poetical circle at Batheaston, where some of his own poems were first read. And yet one of the reasons why he is still charming is that in spirit he partly belonged to it; that he remained a witty amateur who thoroughly enjoyed what he laughed at.

He makes one exclaim, like his Decayed Macaroni:

I'll hasten, O! Bath, to thy springs
Thy seats of the wealthy and gay,
Where the hungry are fed with good things,
And the rich are sent empty away.

Not, on reflection, hasten. Proceed to, slowly, in old age. A house in Royal Crescent—like that house through whose windows I peered, to watch George Saintsbury, in a skull-cap, immeasurably old, writing the letters which nobody would be able to decipher—a little walk in the Pump Room, tea at the Pulteney, and a respectable death of a stroke. Perhaps a mild smell of gas on the stairs; and snow in the valley. Bath calls for a little fantastication. . . . The newspapers interrupt this dream. Bath is in danger of improvement. It would be a great improvement to replace the eighteenth-century houses, or preferably to interblend the eighteenth-century houses with blocks of flats, so that a larger number of families can appreciate the unspoiled charm of Bath. Recent building in St. James's Square, London, and elsewhere, has shown how inconspicuously such blocks march with their neighbours. Any possible inconsistency is at once banished by a screen of Ionic columns on the eleventh floor, and a few cement wreaths. It would be nice to leave an eighteenth-century house here and there, so that it can be preserved; in fact, the rest had better go quick, for that very purpose. After all, it is not as though Bath were really old. Cardinal Wolsey

never had a palace there, John of Gaunt never fought in the streets, Magna Carta was not signed there, there is no Chaucer Lounge at the Pulteney. It is only eighteenth-century, the part of Bath one goes to see.

On further reflection, "hasten" is right.

For years I have collected mid-nineteenth century books on internal decoration, and especially on ecclesiastical decoration. I have some rare treasures, some gems hideous beyond description, but few more rewarding than the Rev. Edward Cutts's *Essay on Church Furniture*, published in 1854. Not that it is a foolish book. Most of it is absolutely sound; its accuracy is chilling. And yet the church furnished on Mr. Cutts's principles is that painstaking disaster, the restored Gothic parish church, as his illustrations very competently show.

The most remarkable thing about the Pugin Gothicists is the excellence of their theory; and the extraordinary discrepancy between what they were doing, and what they thought they were doing. The polychrome wells; the encaustic tiles, carefully copied from the pavements at Winchester and Jumièges; the Lord's Table, covered, in accordance with the 84th Canon, but regretfully, with a *single* cloth; the gas-lights "for which the mediaeval artist would have gladly given all his wax tapers and twinkling lamps"; the windows newly filled with Powell's stamped quarries: the total effect might be a little over-bold,

fact of England. In the period of comparative modesty which has succeeded, the white-heat of such mysticism is embarrassing to remember. It is difficult to read a book, like, say, *Beauchamp's Career*, without a blush. Full of the intense but narrow rapture which makes us so indefinable to our neighbours, Meredith shows an England on the verge of going, but to make room for the headquarters of an Empire; and in his *Pictures*, Birket Foster is trying to lay the cottage, the valley, the stream, the haycock, with equal reverence, upon the altar.

Those who go abroad must have found for themselves that what we in England call Country is nothing of the kind. It is a respite from Town, and no more. The first essential of Country is that it should not be exploited as such; and I do not know of any part of England where one can be certain not to meet people deliberately enjoying themselves. Country is Slovakia, is the Hortobagy, is the Algarve, is Périgord. England, as Birket Foster understood, was bound to be divided into streaks of Town and non-Town. In consequence a new mentality has arisen which perceives no difference between the streaks. Quite lately a girl said to me: "Mummy is impossible. She won't get to like the country. I took her to Cannes. I took her to Venice. I took her to Salzburg. But it was no good. She would come back to a town again."

I believe there were only a few buyers for W. Gaunt's

London Promenade, that excellent modern Microcosm of London. It suggests very well that a synthesis of all the Londons is possible, though the suggestion probably has appeal chiefly for those who, like myself, do not live there; and it gives clever drawings of tempting places, which the uninitiate sadly knows he will never take the final trouble of hunting down for himself: the Lord Belgrave, R. E. Jones's, the Dogs at Wembley.

The people of Paris, and Vienna, and (I am told) New York, consciously live in those cities. Their ways take them about. The people of London, on the other hand, live in South Kensington, or Bermondsey, or Camden Town. Even in the little world of the rich there is Hyde Park for a No Man's Land. Eaton Place crosses it in a spirit of adventure to lunch with Sussex Square, with a compliment for a passport. "Your side of the park," says Eaton Place, "is so much airier." It is, in fact, an unfamiliar world with an air of its own, in which Eaton Place can never be at ease.

My first London promenade Mr. Gaunt does not touch. It consisted of two parallel roads to the Park. There was a grander road by Eccleston Street; and a more interesting one by Elizabeth Street. Grandeur usually prevailed. The butler and my nanny brought the pram down the steps, each condescending to the other. My gaiters were sharply buttoned in the hall, and a white scarf tied round my neck—for it seems always to have been winter. On the pavement, a blue rug

was wound round my waist, and a kind of collapsible trough was arranged in the pram so that I could sit upright. Then I was whisked into my seat, packed up in a second rug and a mackintosh cover which smelt strongly and was looped on to two brass nails; the hood was put up—for it seems always to have been about to rain—my nanny's umbrella with a carved dog's-head handle was plunged into a basket umbrella-case in front of her; some toys stuffed into the trough below my feet (each purposeful gesture swaying the pram); my nanny re-buttoned her starched cuffs; and we were off. Because of the hood and my cold—for I seem always to have had a cold—I did not notice much on the way. There was a certain interest in counting which of the area bells had broken chains, and which of the area doors had a number painted on them. But I could only see downwards, because of the hood. There was the possibility of a tyre coming off the pram; and there were the violent jerks at each crossing when my nanny lifted the front wheels off the ground so as to bump the rear ones over the curb. Then up again on the other side. In fact, our walk was extremely uneventful; and, which was worse, day after day the same.

I only discovered Mr. Gaunt's territory years later when D., a woman friend of my mother's who lived alone in a basement, and had artistic tastes—two facts which seemed to me more incompatible at fifteen than now—asked me to luncheon in Soho. We lunched at *le Petit Riche*, for some years afterwards the synonym

in my mind for Pieria and Eleusis in one, and most probably I complained to her unjustly of incomprehension from my family. It was a date in my life: more of a date than the day which that family singled out, a year or so later, to hang with crape and strew with ashes: the day they allowed me to act in an Oriental play among new and doubtful friends, dressed in a yard of green satin and a couple of ostrich feathers. It was a date, because D. was the first person to give me the status of an entire, and separately invitable, person.

From that day on, full of a new independence, I began to walk about London; at first in the near neighbourhood, then "over the Bridge" (which meant getting as far as Eccleston Square), and then at large. First by day, and then by night. I suppose nothing is more fun than one's first attempts to see how ill one can make oneself feel the next day; and overnight the Muses forsook *le Petit Riche* for the Silver Slipper and the Blue Lagoon.

When I was up at Oxford, J. took me from de Beauvoir Town to the Elephant and Castle, from Hounslow to Greenwich, looking at churches, and obscure squares, and fragments of Regency town-planning. But I was never again able to make any coherent picture of London by day; and probably the reason why I like *London Promenade* is that it moves in the London of bars and theatres and narrow streets which, even by day, lurk in a kind of private evening.

That London has kept for me a little flutter of excitement. For years my home was in London, but my home life had no particular urban associations. I walked into London when I slammed the door in the evening, and I left London, exultantly late at night, when I went home; from the Lyons in New Oxford Street where the cashier sat in an octagonal aluminium font, or from Claridges, or from a basement far darker than D.'s and from people of more doubtful artistry. It is provoking to reflect that anything so commonplace can have been, and for so long, so exceedingly amusing.

I hope Mrs. Molesworth is still read. A few years ago *Herr Baby* was out of print; but a good many nurseries seem still to be faithful to *The Cuckoo Clock*. Like all good children's books, hers give an intense pleasure to grown-ups; but they offer children what I take to be the harvest of *surréalisme*: the distillation of an object into an atmosphere. For queer events in themselves leave a child perfectly cold; exciting events also. Without what can be called a high dream-power, they only amuse grown-ups.

The Cuckoo Clock has that power. It creates a secret untransmittable picture: the turn of an ancient staircase in the evening, a dark labyrinth of wainscoted corridors. I cannot remember any of the events in the book, but I can move in its atmosphere at will. Even when it first was read to me, the events were less

important than their overtones; and I believe all imaginative children only use books as a lever to set their private world at work.

The books can be quite worthless, but they must have that power of distillation. There was a book of Louisa M. Alcott, *Eight Cousins*, which had it to a high degree. An uncle had returned with a trunkful of curious presents for his prim, sickly little niece, who, in subsequent chapters, was to be transformed by the rowdy cousins. The uncle was a bearded, sea-going, sensible American uncle of the 'sixties; and the presents revealed, to me, all the excitement of far places, all the life and room of the unfamiliar. They were from China and the Indies, so far as I remember: a tea service, embroideries, ivory, sandal-wood; and the whole book, because of that chapter, was bathed in brilliant sunshine. It gave me a mystical feeling for trunks. Yet I do not suppose it had much merit as a book, any more than *The Secret Garden* or *Anne of Green Gables*, both of which opened exactly such avenues in my ten-year-old mind as I should look for now to the poets.

In the end, the dangerous pleasure of a private world is, for those who can afford it, the only panacea. No wonder we remember affectionately the budding of that world, the peaceful beginning when it could absorb with confidence as much of the real world as it chose, and reject the rest. Even when the real world was one in which the skylights in a big house were to

be painted over, so that the Zeppelins could not find a mark by night, a child was only pleasantly affected by it. For the Zeppelin was less real than *The Cuckoo Clock*, and one's mother playing the violin, and the fun of using saccharin instead of sugar.

William Walsh—the “knowing Walsh,” whom Pope, meaning to be kind, hardly repaid with the epithet—is remembered for two lyrics; but amongst the little he wrote is some delightful stuff, and some very good sense. His charm is the slightly over-ripe charm suitable to the very last of the Restoration lyric poets. He died in 1711, having preserved into middle-age an acid Caroline ring to his tinkling; having lived splendidly; and having been among the first to discover the importance of Pope as a very young man. Two more songs, at least, should be constantly remembered:

Though Celia's born to be ador'd,
And Strephon to adore her born,
In vain her pity is implor'd,
Who kills him twice with charms and scorn.

Fair saint, to your blest orb repair,
To learn in heaven a heavenly mind;
Thence harken to a sinner's prayer
And be less beauteous, or more kind.

To His Mistress. Against Marriage

Yes, all the world must sure agree
He who's secure of having thee
Will be entirely blest:
But 'twere in me too great a wrong,
To make one who has been so long
My queen, a slave at last.

Nor ought those things to be confin'd
That were for public good design'd:
Could we, in foolish pride,
Make the sun always with us stay,
'Twould burn our corn and grass away,
To starve the world beside.

Let not the thoughts of parting fright
Two souls, which passion does unite;
For while our love does last
Neither will strive to go away;
And why the devil should we stay,
When once that love is past?

Supposing a foreigner asked for a single book, to rough-hew a conception of England, in the sense that *Bouvard et Pécuchet* rough-hews France: a book, that is, which blocks in what elementary mathematics might call an English common denominator, I do not know of anything better than *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*. The details of this extraordinary work may have vanished

with the 'fifties; but the total impression is absolutely modern. Scrape away the new gentility, the pseudo-New York smartness, of the ordinary English wife; and there, if not Miss Prettyman, is Mrs. Caudle.

There is certainly no other country in Europe, of which a still-recognizable portrait was painted in 1845; perhaps because every other country has since learned the meaning of poverty, which, with its politico-social consequences, has scored the picture, while England, almost untouched, has either been getting richer or keeping, if precariously, her wealth at a comfortable level. The lay-out, as well as the spirit, of the country has not fundamentally altered since the repeal of the Corn Laws. A few big houses have changed hands: the majority have not. Large properties are breaking, but have not broken up. The slums which were the scandal of 1845 are likely to be the scandal of 1945. There is still the same faint impression upon amused observers that English people, at their most typical, are on a music-hall stage—honest, ridiculous, with an eye to the main chance and a touch of unlikely genius.

The Caudles show themselves clearly in what I take to be a fairly reliable cross-section of English life: the wireless programme which our Government licenses to amuse the majority. From my home in Austria I listen to Warsaw, Bucharest or Turin. I hear Hugo Wolf songs, a dance band and a performance of *La Gioconda*. Then, from any English station, I am given

vaudeville: sometimes very genteel indeed, but usually real vaudeville from the pier pavilion, well-intentioned, heavy, respectful, good-tempered. Mr. Caudle is at the club. But the shadow of Mrs. Caudle hangs over that innocent beery gaiety. There'll be the devil to pay if it goes too far. Which applies to more than vaudeville.

With its mixture of cheerful (to some, funereal) rubbish, high-mindedness and severity, the wireless only administers again and again the spirit of these lines from the *Curtain Lectures*:

‘. . . I should like to know what that book’s about. What!

‘Milton’s “*Paradise Lost*.”’

‘I thought some rubbish of the sort—something to insult me. A nice book, I think, to read in bed; and a very respectable person he was who wrote it.

‘*What do I know of him?*

‘Much more than you think. A very pretty fellow, indeed, with his six wives. What?

‘*He hadn’t six—he’d only three!*

‘That’s nothing to do with it; but of course, you’ll take his part. Poor women! A nice time they had with him. I dare say! And I’ve no doubt, Mr. Caudle, you’d like to follow Mr. Milton’s example; else you wouldn’t read the stuff he wrote.’

If Britannia were to speak on the Last Day in her domestic character, those words would do.

Now that tests, printed forms and verbal examinations are in fashion, to other forms of useless efficiency might be added proper qualifications for parenthood. Among them I would give a high importance to the digestion of certain novels. Since orthodoxy is often a form of laziness, I should put *South Wind* first, although the possessive way in which the admirers of that book speak of it, and the eagerness with which they identify the characters (at one time I knew simultaneously eleven originals of Dennis), may have taken in advance the edge off its brilliant common-sense. Of course, *The Way of all Flesh* would follow. After such violent medicine, something alexipharmic; and I think I choose *Tom Jones*, a book about a young man with whom it is almost impossible not to be in love, whatever the reader's age or sex; for not only is Tom Jones perhaps the most convincing character in fiction, but he positively reconciles the reader to the weakness of humanity.

Some unlucky children still live in the sadistic atmosphere of *Holiday House*, but on the whole it is the good nursery of fiction, and the charming mischievous child, which should be pilloried. For this purpose, I recommend *Wee MacGregor*; and then at once, as a corrective, the first two parts of *Le Grand Meaulnes*. *Serena Blandish* should do much to fortify mothers against all eventualities, although on the whole they need less fortification than fathers. And for very extreme cases of parental fatuity, I recommend a

hardening course of Gulliver. But that dangerous book should only be supplied to adults on a graduate's prescription.

With this detective-story in my hand, I was left at Eton for the first time. We had filled up the papers at the school office as slowly as possible, and lingered, among other families in the same irresolute state, over tea at Rowlands'. But at last they gave me my detective-story and left me, alone with my new bath and my new can, my new chair and my new ottoman, and a few articles of furniture through which my predecessor had bored holes with a red-hot poker. The room was small, and the flowers on the paper had once been very bright; we were not allowed curtains; and the unshaded light in the middle of the room glazed the whole room with an even, disagreeable enamel.

Through the window came a regular, thin hiss of water and an occasional emphatic downpour. I found that it gave on to the ventilator of the house lavatories. I had never been to school before, and the noises the other way, from the passage, sounded more interesting than frightening. When I had the resolution to look out, I found the hideous passage full of incongruous delicacies: fur coats and cigarette-smoke, and a whiff of scent. The last parents still lingered.

I was left alone to my detective-story, for there were no other new boys. At seven the door opened, and the

captain of the house looked in, who happened to be a cousin. "Your people told me to look you up," he said; and he was as embarrassed as I. We are members of the same club, and I am still embarrassed when we meet, for he had, on that very first day, a moustache and a stiff collar, and seemed to me immense. The names of his coevals are still in my mind; Gordon and the two Aldermans, Hodgkin and Whiteford. I remember nobody, thank Heaven, between them and my own generation; but the beauty and the glitter, and above all the size, of the Library in my first half, is ever-present.

I had to lay down my detective-story for supper. I sat next to Ley, who wore a brown suit. I had always wanted a brown suit. I knew at once that the incident was a symbol. Everybody at school would have things I had not got, and the question would be how long I could keep going before I was found out. Luckily, I never was wholly found out. Eton was always, as at the first minute, more interesting than frightening; only at times I thought my number was up. A year later, after I had played unusually badly in a football match, the captain said: "If you go on as you are going, Pryce-Jones, you will be classed with Hinds and Sandford." I can never describe the implications of that. At least, I had been able to tell myself, I am not like Hinds and Sandford. And thenceforward I gave them all the hell I could, to prove the point. At about the same time a second event terrified me more. Years before, I had

written certain facts on a piece of doll's writing-paper, and printed GENERAL INFORMATION on the envelope. The number of ounces in a pound, the number of inches in a foot, the definition of π , and so on. The writing-paper was pink, with a darker pink border. And one day I found the envelope lying on the top of a drawer, with "Thanks for information" scrawled across it. *Mene mene tekel upharsin*, I read, sweating, and wondered whether I ought not to tie strings across the door at night.

But there never was any trouble. I never was found out. Ley turned into a useful ally; the detective-story acquired no symbolic value. When we crowded round the fire, six of us jogging one another with our elbows, I jogged as hard as anybody, and forced my piece of toast against the coals till my finger joints could bear the blaze no longer. I knew they had not found me out. And when I managed to create a substitute for myself by winning the house-fives or a quarter-mile race, that allophyl, slightly buffoon-like, personality covered me so well that at times I thought I had won the small silver cup in my own capacity. I was reassured in this dream by my ugly little room, and the ease with which I assimilated it. The linoleum lining of the bureau: the chipped brown tea-pot, the frowstiness of an ottoman full of unwashed football-shirts and the inners of fives-gloves stiff with sweat, became so quickly both welcoming and necessary that I nearly brought off a change which would have been

comparable, almost, to a change of sex. I nearly became a straightforward little boy.

I could not keep it up. It was not I who won the house-fives; it was a phantom who deputed in my skin on the day. And before long I did not much mind. I was absorbed by the triumph of not having been caught once in the act of wearing my own face.

The Zeitgeist plays disagreeable tricks; and yet each revolution of time finds it plausible to try for an exemption. Surely, the generations exclaim, nobody will ever find us ridiculous. At last, surely, the grounding is firm; we can make a beginning.

Even the contributors to the *Forget-Me-Not*, the *Lotus*, and their rivals, must have thought so. But the Zeitgeist behaves with the cruelty of the spider. It sucks the blood from its victims and leaves an empty husk.

The *Forget-Me-Not* poets wrote less portentously than the school monitors of to-day. They were content to scribble with a pen rather than a rod from the lictor's bundle or the blunt end of a Marxian hammer. But the Zeitgeist is not particular over niceties of diet. Haydon and Kandinsky, Hauer and Cherubini, Alaric A. Watts and the head prefect all look the same when the spider has done with them.

The critical faculty is even more capricious in its workings than the creative faculty. Does it not seem odd that sensibility and knowledge should have such

little power to cope with the present tense? That, like the old-fashioned water-colourist in space, the critic has to recede, in time, holding out his pencil to judge the proportions? If one can be sure about a poem which asserts in one manner:

The free, fair homes of England!
Long, long in hut and hall,
May hearts of native proof be reared
To guard each hallowed wall!
And green for ever be the groves,
And bright the flowery sod,
Where first the child's glad spirit loves
Its Country and its God!

if so, why be unsure about a poem which asserts:

I regret your bohemia's aesthetic blindness to the
lovely world
Of wavesmooth tyrannous cars and departures in the
Golden Arrow
And girls with expensive lips, plucked eyebrows and
precise buttocks.
I admire Arnold Bennett's adjustment of such frank
appreciations
To the Artist's need to be homeless, uprooted, dis-
loyal, ready
With a curt antiseptic finger for entrails, his own or
another's ?

or, as another poet more succinctly (and better) puts it:

England our cow
Once was a lady—is she now?

We are in much the same situation as the critics who were comforted by the *Lyrical Ballads*. Letters are again moving sharply back to life, and ending, as all mass movements in the arts end, for the most part in triviality. Only, instead of the annuals being called *Forget-Me-Not* and *Lotus* they are called the *Driving-Belt* and the *Refrigerator*. The contents, with a change of mythology, are identical.

To know something of one province of a large subject brings out the devil. When I re-open Mr. Sitwell's *German Baroque Art*, therefore, it is no longer to admire, but to compare; to see whether he has been caught napping. There was some excuse for missing Stadl Paura—I, as he appears to have done, explored all round it without knowing, until at last by chance, that the best baroque pilgrimage church in Austria was hidden there. But Dürnstein and Altenburg, and Admont, among the abbeys, and the whole field of Austrian country houses, from Neu Wartenburg to Schloss Herberstein, are larger omissions.

From end to end, Austria is dotted with baroque buildings. They are the spontaneous expression of the country, just as Waterhouse Domestic Gothic, during a similar period of national *Aufschwung*, reflected nineteenth-century England. But of them all, though it has

neither the situation of Melk, nor the façade of St. Florian, I am not sure that Altenburg is not the most satisfactory. It lies in a little-visited part of the country, among the forests which join the Moravian frontier; and from the low hill upon which it is built, there is nothing to be seen except tree-covered valleys, crossing and re-crossing one another with the suspicious carelessness of vast-scale landscape gardening, to carry the eye to Count Hoyos's towering castle of Rosenberg above the Kamp.

From the library one has, even more than at Melk, the impression of breathing in a busy, coloured air. The room hangs over the hill, and reflects the momentary colours of the forest with an extraordinary pale brilliance. The windows let the sky directly in; and the walls retort with a cloudy marble brightness, built round light blue and a cherubic pink, of far greater delicacy than the usual luxurious pigskin-brown and violet of Untersberg marble. The colours are almost as clear as porcelain; and, to emphasize their clarity, under the three painted cupolas, and above darkly-gilded capitals, are black grotesques in stucco, which set the multiplied colour-variations of the room to rights. Throughout the abbey the stucco-work—in the library the work of an obscure craftsman, Michael Flor, who succeeded Franz Josef Holzinger, later *Stuckmeister* of Wilhering and St. Florian—is magnificent, if not, as Baedeker claims for it, “die reichste Folge üppiger Stuckdekorationen, die uns aus dem

XVIII Jahrt. erhalten sind." And throughout the abbey there is fascinating evidence of the genius of local craftsmen. Certain important work was done by outsiders. Paul Troger, the most celebrated Central European fresco-painter of his time, worked for many months at Altenburg, and Munkenast, who completed his master Prandtauer's work at Melk, was in charge of the rebuilding of the church. But under Holzinger worked three *Stukkateure* and twenty cutters from one year to another, who came from the little neighbouring town of Horn; so that a high proportion of the wonderfully delicate ornamentation of the abbey can be safely put to the credit of village artificers.

It is lucky that any delicacy survives. The ceremonial rooms were used during the Napoleonic wars as a Military Hospital, and in 1799 as quarters for the Russian army. During the Austrian-Prussian war of 1866 they were turned into a cholera hospital, and during the last war, a convalescents' hospital. Yet so calm and lost does Altenburg appear to-day that it seems inconceivable for any public body to have discovered so much as its existence.

One other room deserves mention: the extraordinary crypt, frescoed with grotesques, and entered by a theatrical double-staircase. Heavy conches, which should spout out water, stand against the walls, which are decorated with scenes calculated to pull Death extravagantly by the beard.

As in most Austrian abbeys, poverty is destroying

what physical violence could not destroy. There are only a handful of fathers left at Altenburg (at Herzogenburg, another splendid Baroque abbey not so very far away, there are less than half a dozen). The fabric is slowly approaching that state of decay which makes the usual tourist feel that he has not been cheated of a genuine Antique.

There is plenty of quiet fun to be got out of *Protestant Vigils During a Journey in Italy*, by Harriet Morton (1829). Her work, written "for the evening tent of the Christian traveller," and published in two luxurious volumes, is, as one might expect, an example of a kind of book which is again respectable nowadays: the putting inconvenient facts on the rack.

Harriet Morton is in "what they call 'a holy place' . . . with fourteen small chapels; in the front of each is a picture, calculated to divert the attention from the hearer of prayer to some immaterial incident, false or true. I observed on the central cross a label, with the words, 'Baciando la santa croce si acquistano due centi giorni d'indulgenza.' 'What indulgence?' said I, to an Italian that stood at my elbow. 'La misericordia di Dio,' he replied, shrugging up his shoulders, with ill-disguised infidelity."

Or she is in St. Peter's, before "a bronze statue. . . . What I am now about to tell you, is, I am aware, almost incredible: it is nevertheless true that, in this nineteenth century, in a temple of a city calling itself the

head and seat of Christendom, I saw all ranks and ages, priests and people, pay apparently the most solemn adoration to this figure. . . . I fixed my eyes upon a priest as he kissed its shining toe—I thought *his eye dropped* as conscious of the fraud.”

Or, indomitable though she be, she becomes almost patronizing. “As to that really blessed woman, Mary, she is continually worshipped and insulted, in the form of little china statues, and carved and painted wooden figures.”

It is noticeable that all such books, from Harriet Morton to Dr. Goebbels, all the hurt shocked books of the last century, all the hurt shocked manifestations of such people in power—the crusades, bannings, pogroms, loud assertions of sex, class, creed, race, privilege—never come from taking too noble, or spiritualized, or confident, a view of the world, but invariably from adopting a narrow position on the flat, and trying, by Procrustean methods, to cram the world in. Shelley hopes for the power of Orpheus; Tolstoy speaks, and waits for the world to answer; Harriet Morton, benevolent or not, becomes Minister of Public Enlightenment with dictatorial powers.

In his quite excellent *Voltaire*, H. N. Brailsford rebukes Voltaire, though mildly, for his inconsistencies of historical interpretation, and, more sharply, for the inconsistencies of his private life: his flirtations with

Rome, for example. But surely the greatness of Voltaire as a force in the world comes of his freedom from the usual vice of intellectuals: pattern-making with social units. The tyranny of Rome is, after all, only one of innumerable possible tyrannies, only one aspect of *l'Infâme*. The magical science of Political Economy can, we know, breed its own superstitions.

Voltaire's empiricism, it may be modestly emphasized, was, beyond everything, Liberal in tendency. He forbore, therefore, to shuffle phenomena into any kind of a pattern, or convert humanity into a collection of medals. Consistency, absolute reliance on a system, strict intellectual integrity, would have petrified Voltaire to a splendid monument. By indicating that the only valid system must be based on an absence of system, he has remained a living force.

Nobody could have been more unsuitable as a giver of Pugin's *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* than little Miss D. It was so out of character for her to own such a book, or, indeed, to own any book except a Miss Mitford or an unopened Trollope.

We were always told that one of the traits which showed the charm of the late Vice-Provost of Eton was a habit of crying whenever he came across the word "little." Miss D., in that case, would have provoked a tempest of tears; by her appearance, and her house, but most of all by the elusive microscopic climate of her existence. For she lived, as it were, inside a drop,

or mote, but so perfectly proportioned to her world that at first sight her life seemed entirely usual.

Miss D. was a youngest daughter, and it therefore fell to her ("therefore" because I am speaking of many years ago) to take care of her mother, when, one by one, the rest of the family married. By the time she was free it was too late. She was enclosed in her mote already, the best, the most eager, the most entirely unselfish, of tiny middle-aged ladies—and, let it quickly be added, the most unsentimental. She was to stay with her brothers in the comfortable houses they had inherited, to execute tiresome small commissions for her sisters at Woolland's, to give luncheon to nieces up from the country, to give cheques, later, to great-nephews on their way to school. For she too had inherited a good deal; and among other things, I suppose, the copy of Pugin.

Her house was tiny, of course. Handy for Woollands', it stood in a street which taxi-drivers never knew. There might have been a latch by the first-floor windows, so that the whole façade could swing open, upon four rooms, with "lace" curtains made of paper glued to the window, and a red-checked wooden maid among the disproportionate crockery below-stairs. In memory, the chief furniture of the house was letter-weights of green Bristol glass, or perky Venetian fragments; and sweet-peas in boxes on the balcony. Celluloid whirligigs were planted beside them, to frighten the sparrows, and when the windows were

open, they edged a minute ribbon of protesting sound into the room at each puff of wind, a reminder of a busy conscience.

The chairs were round but deceitful. Children slid off the chintz. One chair was reinforced with iron for my great-aunt A., who was too big for the house. The writing-table was almost nervously tidy, for her years of attendance had unfitted Miss D. for even the simplest affair of business; and she had been known to ask help from my father in writing out a cheque. But, to make up, the other tables in the room were covered with a wilderness of silver candle-snuffers and scent-bottles and needle-cases and pin-cushions, which, simply because of their size, seemed to make apter furniture for her world even than the Bristol globes, with their curious buried flowers, or the real flowers between their dutiful officers.

Miss D. herself sat among this fragile population with the air of having triumphantly evaded her own whirligigs. She wore a long violet skirt, belted tightly round the waist, and widening over her boots with sober reluctance. A great many little buttons ran up the front of her taffeta blouse, which ended in a pretty turn-over collar; and her long jacket was plentifully worked in braid. With a miniature hat perched on her head, and secured by an elastic; and an umbrella in her hand, long-handled and shaped somewhat like a firework, she went shopping, walking at a great rate. And when her sister was staying with her, who dressed

in exactly the same style and came to London twice a year, it was actually moving to watch the two of them, pacing briskly along the squares and pausing, for the benefit of the country sister, at each bright shop-window. It was not that they looked defenceless or peculiar in the twentieth century. They did not, in any way, suggest the twentieth century, they were so excitedly unaware of it.

And now nobody will ever know what Miss D. really thought. Her active goodness, her innocent wit—when I was quite small and we were told she was coming I had begun to laugh as soon as the bell rang—her generosity, anybody could see. But once, when I was staying with her, she said in a different voice: “Families ought to let one be the sort of person one wants to be,” and then: “They mean to be kind.”

In making it so hard for her to be any sort of person at all, they certainly had meant to be kind.

Boileau in Tetuán. Instead of a hundred bright pictures of Morocco, I see myself, with unnecessary clarity, reading Boileau in the hotel lavatory. Not that there is anything odd in that. The honest traveller, when it comes to telling what he has seen, has to rub up the Kariyeh Mosque and the little Piazza San Ignazio in Rome, and the Cartuja at Granada from a note-book. The pretty secondaries of sight-seeing tend to merge. But certain sights and noises and smells of the twentieth order, never.

Therefore, I see myself with exactitude in the hotel lavatory, Boileau in hand. It is a proof of the oddness which solitary travelling sweats out of one. For why Boileau? The question is rhetorical. After a month or two of his own company in one hotel bedroom after another nobody is quite responsible. Everybody plays with the manners which reach their extreme in Nietzsche: the innumerable medicine-bottles on a tray, the curt petrified nod in coming into a dining-room, the melancholy which brings on a physical fever. The demon is on the watch. He particularly enjoys hotel life; and is only too happy to offer his company to a single bed, especially in the small rooms on a high floor, back from the street, and far from the lavatory. Boileau can therefore be taken as a shield, possibly even as an offensive weapon, for the walk down the passage. An alexandrine is as good an interdict as another to the pictures of the demon: the flashes of megalomania, the anxieties about health, uncertainty whether it would not be better to move on, concentration on a snore beyond the partition, or a waiter's finger in the food.

If the frequency of its appearance in bookshops meant anything, Falconer's *Shipwreck* would be among the twenty most celebrated poems in English. In every sixpenny box, and even in the tuppenny boxes, the little brown volume lies, foxed (or, as the shops which are grand enough to publish a catalogue say,

embrowned), with an ataxic back-strip, and a shivering binding.

My own copy is more luxurious than most. The binding stands firm; and is gold-tooled into the bargain. And the poem is "embellished with engravings from Richd. Westall, R.A." The price is marked 1s. 6d; but I believe it came from the sixpenny box all the same. (Often the prices are marked as high as a pound in pencil on the fly-leaf, presumably in case the books are to be given away for a present. They each cost sixpence, however.) It would be as interesting to know why the world decided to sell its *Falconers* as why it ever bought them in such numbers. Poetic merit cannot have influenced either decision. It would be typically English to make the *Shipwreck* a success because its author was not a poet but a professional sailor, with the extra singularity that he was the only member of a large family to be neither deaf nor dumb. His death by shipwreck may have completed his qualifications. Then the reaction probably dates from a pre-war belief that poetry, unless franked by church and state in such persons as Dean Trench and Lord de Tabley, is a suspicious twilit power: a companion to Freemasonry, the Mafia, Jesuitry, the Medmenham rites. Very probably, while upper-class parents were taking fright over Swinburne and the *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, the middle-classes, caught by a backwash of panic, were selling the *Shipwreck*. And once on the move, it is not likely for a *Shipwreck* to find an abiding

home until, after descending through all the grades of boxes right to the barrow, the binding cedes for ever, and the pages are pulped out of their misery.

The very great, among their advantages, have not, on the whole, that of being lovable. Quite a small inoculation of greatness, indeed, is usually enough to make a character entirely the reverse. As to those whose loveliness has become proverbial, the Elias, the Burnses, the Keatses, I do not know that it is convincing; and I do know that the century or more between us acts as a very convenient buffer. People succumb to those qualities in the dead which they trounce in the living. The daintiest old lady in Thrums is proud of Burns's capacity for liquor (it is curious that the world's darlings have been pretty constantly drunk); and their more erudite voluptuousness has given to Byron and Shelley—the first names to come into my head—an affectionate glamour which five minutes' conversation would have destroyed for exactly those who, at a safe distance, are most sensitive to it.

With Cowper we are on firmer ground. Less great, he is easier to love. For he possesses to its highest degree, almost, that quality which, when it is combined with genius, is the foundation of charm: he was always afraid.

Cowper and Collins and Darley in England, Hölderlin in Germany, Louis Bertrand in France;

those lost terrified faces. The foolish clouds which hang about them are a living charm, while the reasonable anguish of greater men has evaporated. Cowper was only the most terrified (and the most charming) despite the time at which he lived. For it must have struck other readers as queer that irrational terrors were most articulate, not when the Church governed undisputed, but during the Age of Reason.

This affectionate feeling towards Cowper springs partly from faith in the power of our own charm. We all see one projection of our personality, at its tenderest, as a Lady with the Lamp. If only, we exclaim, when we read of the defeated, if only *I* had been there! With odious confidence—or perhaps we stifle the thought in time—we know that we could have averted the defeat. It would have been so easy just to explain to Cowper, to soothe him, distract him, unlike the dreadful Newton and the inadequate Hayley. To have put those sharp pleasant eyes at rest in the sharp soft face, how creditable, and how easy! or to have prescribed a tonic, to have referred with authority to hormones, to have imputed his foretaste of hell-fire to defective glands.

But partly one loves Cowper because one loves fear. One loves such a conservative democratic emotion, an emotion which implies a need for the crowd, a participation in the will of the crowd. A deeper knowledge of Cowper, however, shows such a simple

reaction to be based on a mistake. He was not, like most people, afraid of personalities but of situations. That is to say, he was afraid *of* himself and not *for* himself. The innocent gentleman feeding his hares is only one facet of a satirical observer. The untraditional Cowper writes, in *The Modern Patriot*:

When lawless mobs insult the court,
That man shall be my toast,
If breaking windows be the sport,
Who bravely breaks the most.

But oh! for him my fancy culls
The choicest flowers she bears,
Who constitutionally pulls
Your house about your ears.

And this vigorous poet, even in the darkest moments of Olney, is never quite submerged in the poet who is exclaiming:

How ill the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree!

Cowper is an encouraging figure to contemplate when the modern world seems too nasty to be bearable. With Bertrand Russell and Butler to read; with the researches of Dr. Hirschfeld to help on one hand and innumerable consulting practitioners to help on the

other hand; with religious orthodoxy so submissive, so polite, so anxious to avoid giving offence; with the ease of a diagnosis in Freiburg and a cure at Colorado Springs; we can feel ourselves lucky. Our fears at least seem likely to end where Cowper's began: with death.

If the foolish labels applied to the decades are valid anywhere, it must be in the Universities. Even the lustres deserve their own nickname. Although it is less than ten years since I went up to Oxford, my Oxford has vanished; or, more probably, moved to Cambridge. For in those days the aesthetes still survived, numerous if not flourishing, and now I believe they do not.

Was Busk an aesthete? One pried into his rooms when he was out, and took stock of what one found. Medici prints on the walls: of Memling and Bellini. So far, non-committal. (I myself was once saved by Botticelli from having my room smashed up. "He must be a good chap. He's got Venus," was the comment reported to me afterwards.) An expensive Donne, but uncut. No pipes, no ukulele. All the time one was really looking for one book. The Bulgarian cigarettes, the Quimper china tea-service, the red-labelled gramophone-records, proved nothing one way; nor the dirty beer glass, the Aertex shirts, and *Le Sourire*, the other. What clinched the matter was whether or no a volume of Firbank stood on the shelf.

Busk was an aesthete, then. According to one's own camp, one contemplated leaving an invitation on the table, or throwing his pearl studs into the Cherwell. And that night, as one arrived, with or without Busk, to dine at the George, one was liable to be welcomed with a shout of "Aesthete!" (or some harsher expression); or with a roll propelled from some temerarious aesthetic hand, as the case might be.

This light-hearted distinction added a welcome interest to life; and gave a great many good pretexts for a battle. For the aesthetes, though flimsier, were as pugnacious as the hearties; and when the hearties decided to break up an aesthetes' party they were liable, at the least, to get a very nasty scratch or two in the course of the breaking.

The aesthetes looked upon themselves as a modern equivalent to the Albigenses, the Hussites, the Jacobites; to any of the heroic minorities of history. But they possessed this advantage over them all, that they had much more fun. In fact, not at any time to have dallied with Oxford aestheticism cuts off the chief satisfaction of being eighteen. Perhaps they were more highly coloured than the Albigenses: in taste, in face, in wit; likely, perhaps, to turn out a Miss Wilberforce in their cups; foolish in the conduct of life; waspish among themselves. But they usually had excellent food and excellent conversation; they annoyed the bores; and most of them anyway have long since bought a bowler hat and become bores themselves.

Unless they sit by a gas-fire in the evening, after their Old Furniture shop has closed, polishing up the old jokes for a few old friends who are sure to laugh.

The great period of aestheticism was, alas, before my time. The roads had been filled (we heard enviously) with charabanc-loads of negresses imported for a luncheon-party; the quads had reeked of ether; the rooms of the celebrated wits had been hung with splendid tapestries and frescoed by a young painter who was going to be marvellous. Braques had adorned the walls, and Gertrude Stein had lectured. . . . In my day we had to make do with less. We had principally the after-taste of glamour. But that was sufficient to make confidential mothers, during the vacations, turn to us at dinner and say in a low voice: "Now you who are at Oxford . . . do tell me; one hears such different things . . . is it really so—is there really much——" but they never could find the words. In fact, there were no words. "It" was nothing at all. Simply a translation of the brittle Firbank world into terms of reality. The reality was brittler, and that is all there is to be said.

What is the peculiar cloud which hangs over the great names of American literature? Emerson, Poe, Whitman: it is not easy to see why their names on the shelf are touched, so obscurely, with depression. All the time something is wrong, and one is not sure what it is. They do not fit into their clothes, they rub their

shoulders irritably inside them as if the padding pricked; and although they write the language of England and think English, so to speak, there is an uneasy noise of the ocean between. We stub our feelings on the lines, and sometimes reach out crossly for ointment, just when those vocal democrats are trying so hard to be analgesic.

Whitman, in particular, is continually hitting himself and his readers hard, to crush a sharper pain, like the children who bang each other's heads so as not to feel the twitching out of a hair. And the escape-poetry of Poe is more a dodge than a flight. One feels that he knew the futility of running, when the threat runs too.

Why we should pigeon-hole them together, though, in a rather stuffy compartment labelled *American Literature* is another matter. Perhaps in part the stuffiness comes from the unreality of nineteenth-century America to Englishmen. America is, to us, always to-day; and Poe, and Whitman, and Emerson, and Longfellow are speaking in the orderly accents of yesterday. They are running up the American flag on what we had taken to be an English colony.

Can we therefore impute to a certain anxiety on their part the disconcerting notes which sound in their music? Poe, in particular, scarcely ever gets through an entire poem without a casual disaster which, in such a fine technique, often seems unbelievably clumsy. He can write:

The sweet Lenore hath "gone before," with Hope,
that flew beside,
Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have
been thy bride—

and, as easily, the subtle stumbling cadences of:

"For we knew not the month was October,
And we marked not the night of the year—
(Ah night of all nights in the year!)
We noted not the dim lake of Auber—
(Though once we had journeyed down here)—
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

The absolute rightness of half his vocabulary is balanced by the rebellious ugliness of the rest. For each "On desperate seas long wont to roam" there is an "Astarte's bediamonded crescent." For each piece of perspicacity in his essays there is a piece of blindness, or, what is more dangerous, of hallucination.

Again that odd itch. He is rubbing his shoulders inside his clothes. Far more Walt Whitman. In the Introduction to my edition of *Leaves of Grass* are the words: "When you are gone so far, when you are so big, when you are so beautiful, you are American." Whitman, coming a few years after Poe, was American then. But he took the opposite course. Instead of escaping, he charged. And those who dislike being

deafened and battered into reverence will prefer Poe. But one course or the other has been forced until to-day on all American poets. In America, they have inherited no convenient English polypary. They have been driven into tiresome affirmations of bigness and beauty, or become expatriates, like Eliot, like perhaps the best American lyricist since Poe, Stuart Merrill, who wrote in French. In the last year or two, the polyps are finding a common stem. The schism between English and American fiction may have helped the poets. By the end of the century there may even be an *American* who is also a very good poet.

The Reverend Michael Russell's account of *Nubia and Abyssinia* (1838) stood, for many years, beside its brothers, *A View of Egypt* and *Palestine*, and a number of cousins, ranging from *Iceland* to *British India*, in a little bookcase in my grandmother's drawing-room. The books were there because they were small and "bound." Aytoun's *Lays* and a copy of *Misunderstood* in pale blue leather lived beside Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful without any embarrassment; and had it ever occurred to anybody to take a book in the hand, there would only have been an outburst of fuss about spoiling the binding.

To these little travel books, however, when at last they were given me, I owe a passion for movement. The map of Iceland, the fjords so packed and curling that it looked like a reindeer's head flung on the page;

the engravings of the Ethiopian Hog, and the Temple of Soleb from the North-East were my first introduction to the marvels of the world. And now, whenever I can supplement the Reverend Michael Russell with my own eyes I consciously add a fresh vignette or a footnote to his volumes. The low ormolu bookcase, long dispersed, still makes a point of departure for travelling.

Nubia and Abyssinia, written in Edinburgh, suffers from lack of vivacity. And from the fact that so little of the subject was then known among Scottish clergymen. Nowadays Mr. Russell would find the Nile boats full of Philadelphia hostesses, cultivated debutantes, and bankers on holiday. My friend Mrs. Schlumberger, of whom I have written elsewhere, uses the Nile as a high-road when she comes back from safari in the Abercorn Mountains. And since most of these people are also in transit they are absolved from taking much interest in the landscape.

But at Abu Simbel they have to be enthusiastic, for since 1838 few greater monuments have been made accessible. It is, in fact, the chief justification for entering Egypt from the south, that the most moving of Egyptian relics is thus the first.

For a day before reaching Abu Simbel, after leaving Wadi Halfa, the desert prepares, more and more brilliantly, for a climax. On one bank the sand is rose-coloured, and, on the other, an even camel-grey, rising into rocky hills at either hand. But to relieve so

much mineral sharpness, though the rosy sand darkens to violet almost in the shadowy hollows and is blown by the wind into a surface which seems to be intricately woven, as if the whole desert were a single tissue, like the wrong-side of satin; to rest the eyes, there is a line of high palms by the water and the very positive green of wheat sown narrowly among them, and trespassing, occasionally, over to half-sunken islets.

We arrived on an evening at the end of March. The hills were closing in on the river, whose curves could be traced by the red ruined walls along their tops. Windows had anciently been cut in the rock, and the white marabouts hung overhead as if the saints were birds in a cage. As it became darker the Nile was no longer transparent, but floated the sails and the black islets horizontally down the water, with the faintly quivering untidiness of a reflexion in silver. The rose and the grey were out of the desert, and the world looked curiously flawless, as if it had caught the intangibility as well as the colour of the sky. There is nothing new to be said about an Egyptian sunset; nevertheless it refuses to be overlooked: whether it is proving earth and sky to have the fragility of an egg-shell, or dabbing the clouds with that vermilion sealing-wax which Mrs. Schlumberger so much enjoys. And seen from a boat, once the fun is over, the clean evening air becomes spicy, and then, in March, rather chilly, while drops of pure light are still falling from the sky in cooler and cooler reflexions of reflexions.

At that moment we arrived. And almost at once the moon was up casting a new kind of shadow, on which the wovenness of the sand imposed a texture, as though the shadows were so much woven purple, thrown on the ground, among the palm-trees and the wheat.

The temple itself stands back from the bank, cut out of the rock face like (but how unlike in feeling!) the Nabataean temples of Petra. Of the four seated colossi one has fallen; the torso, rather, has fallen. The ponderous sightlessness of the remaining three, by moonlight, evoked due comment from the little figures who trooped out of the boat. B. and I ran ahead, through the outer temple, past scarcely less huge figures, to the penetralium where four gods, battered into a syphilitic travesty, stand behind an altar. In ruins, they showed still their strenuous contempt of stone. Like any of the best Egyptian statuary, they might have moved suddenly. In the outer temple the bankers and the hostesses were dutifully admiring. Mrs. Schlumberger, in dusty electric light, was pointing her cinema-kodak at the frescoed bowmen. "There's not a chance," she was saying to Sir Patrick Schwob, "but it's worth trying. These newest Panchromatic films are equal to anything. Last catorze July, in Mountparnass, when you couldn't see a thing. . . ." Her voice was overtrumped by the guide's.

When we came out, two little boys took us for a

climb above the temple, through sand as obstructive as the sand in dreams. We struggled up for half an hour, sinking at each step, until we came into the full moon at the top. The cornfields below were visibly green, and the sand was no longer woven but enamelled, with warm bright shadows (for the moon was extraordinarily splendid) among the rocks. There was a wind, and a wall had been built against the blown sand, which travelled like a stinging mist across a wide plain. We came down running as hard as we could, as if we were running down a feather-bed. Again, as in dreams, I took huge perpendicular strides and never fell on the soft cliff.

The boat left at sunrise. The temple then showed more clearly, like the imprint of a divine seal on the rock. The abstract of Egypt, the wooden creak of irrigation, trickled from the narrow wheat-fields. Early-risers were full of comment on deck: but there was really no comment to make, no deduction to draw. Ozymandias, perhaps, brushed by us; but Egypt is the most reticent of civilizations.

After a certain age, books no longer create a world. One becomes conscious that the stereoscope has two eye-pieces, whereas at first one had only looked at the picture. I can still shut myself into some of those half-forgotten imaginary worlds, or, rather, like a blind man in front of a relief map, I can run a finger over the surface and revive the landscape from its skeleton; but

I never seem to add a fresh world to the old. A few books, however, have created a province for me in the world of fact; in particular, Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*.

I must have bought it at the Eton Pound, for it is stamped with the name of Harford mi., McNeile's; and for some reason I fell into the habit of re-reading it whenever I was ill. At last it became a fetish. I *had* to re-read it, to bring myself good luck; to be the iller, and consequently "stay out" the longer.

All my childhood I had had constant headaches; and when I arrived at Eton there was an understanding with m'dame that if I had a headache I should not hesitate to say so. My first years at Eton were excellent fun, and I resented feeling ill. At first by talent, and then, when I learnt the ropes, by a combination of talent and competent cheating, I did well in work, which pleased the authorities, and got me the quite amiable reputation of an eccentric. But later, as cunning and good luck waxed and talent became more and more rusty from disuse, I was dismayed to find myself in improving health, just when an excuse for wayward disappearances from school became an absolute necessity.

A headache, however, is not one of your gross maladies which can be checked on a thermometer or cured by a pill. It can be used artistically: heightened, prolonged, or downright invented. And so the more horrible Field-Days and Extra Works and neglected

punishments often coincided with a day in bed, and a little holiday in the Cevennes.

The *Travels* must once have been set as a holiday task, for Harford mi. has been liberal with underlinings, ever on the watch for a possible question. On the very first page, for example, and in the first sentence, each of the four points is underlined: "Monastier is notable for the *making of lace*, for *drunkenness*, for *freedom of language*, and for *unparalleled political discussion*." After about page 20, he is less conscientious; probably got no further, indeed. But unfortunately his system does not underestimate the competence of the examiners.

I never had the good luck to be examined in the *Travels*—for at the time I left Eton I knew them almost by heart. However stupid and all-pervading Eton seemed to be, they took me out of it. I was unconsciously playing a variation of Pirandello's game of escape by geography. And when the noise in the passage died away, and the chapel bell stopped, and a little white ticket on the door shut off all active contact with a school, I escaped even from the passive presence of cheap wall-paper and idiotic questions in logarithms. Escaped infallibly.

I think that those who, like me, needed a way of escape, were all flying, not from the incidents, but from the atmosphere of school. It was not that disagreeable things happened to us; but that, when we were most definitely schoolboys, we felt ourselves

most definitely crippled. We found ourselves in the predicament of the Determinist limerick, "not even a 'bus but a tram." Disagreeable things did not happen, or else were rather amusing. Nothing was more cheerful than a tanning, even when one was to repay, by one's own suffering, the pleasure extracted from the sufferings of others. When we had been making a noise, Gordon had come in, and there had been a look in his eye. We were sure to be beaten before prayers. Or we had slacked in the Lower Boy, or were accused of being vague, or had stolen somebody else's frog for the Corps Parade and lied about it afterwards. There was no reason to take refuge in the Cevennes. Directly after supper the victims congregated, waiting. A single victim was a good dramatic figure, whose clever buffooning could turn him into a temporary hero. Then the cry, "Boy!" And the scampering to the Library. And the ambassadors, tittering, sent upstairs: "Pryce-Jones and Underwood wanted in the Library." We went in, with a twitch in the thighs and a touch of breathlessness, and somebody stopped the gramophone. During the short examination, which always ended in Guilty, we knew that ecstatic heads were pressed against the door, listening. We took stock of the Library, of *La Vie Parisienne* triumphantly open on the floor, Gordon rather pasty, Maxwell rather beautiful, the others reading a newspaper in magnificent attitudes of withdrawal. "Go outside," we were told, and then "Underwood!" was called

through the door. A minute afterwards the muffled whacking. It didn't hurt very much, and it was delightful talking about it later as one trooped down to prayers and was solaced by an understanding smile from one of the Library, while the house knelt and the victims tested their behinds against their trousers with surreptitious wriggings, and m'tutor intoned: "O God, Who art the author of peace and lover of concord."

The corps parades, which so annoy anti-militarist critics, were, at Eton, looked on as a more or less harmless bore. On a celebrated occasion, the unit of one house, during an important and, as far as I can remember, Royal inspection, numbered up to ten and continued "Knave," "Queen," "King." Then they began again with "Ace." The O.T.C. was always taken in that spirit, except by the corporals and officers who approached the rank and file in the apostolic spirit of country squires who go to church for the sake of the example. Here again was no reason for an escape to the Cevennes.

Compulsory Games? We could at least, except during the winter half, choose what games we wanted to play, and though the only way to get honour was to play them well, there was no dishonour in playing them badly.

No, it was the realization that all the essential school atmosphere—I do not at all mean specifically the Eton atmosphere—cramped and chopped and stupefied us, which made an escape necessary. We

found our real work done outside the curriculum, we found ourselves much older than the lives we were allowed to lead; and we found a disturbing grocer's mentality among our pedagogues. They were terrified of being accused of selling knowledge under-weight. Notes were dictated, précis required, certain points had, by hook or by crook, to be reached by a certain date. We were sacks being crammed rather than potentially quite normal persons whose minds would be better served by learning how to work for themselves. In after-life there is nobody to tabulate the consequences of the 'Thirty Years' War; we have to look them up, grumbling, for ourselves. And even at sixteen we were dismayed to find that our most valuable moments—and this included the whole range of "useful experience," a subject which was very far from entering the curriculum—were always when, inside the framework of a public school, we had been at war with it.

At first sight that may seem a serious charge against a school; but I am not so sure. There is something about the conception of a perfectly sensible school which arouses instinctive mistrust; and at least we were allowed a good deal of individual freedom. We learned good manners, and the momentary polish upon the very top of our minds civilized us, we thought, above the barbarous majority outside. If we were permanently unfitted for earning our living, it might be argued that only a negligible minority of Etonians

have to rely entirely on their own resources. There is always somebody in the background. And as a prelude to taking to county activities, or estate management (only it had better be one's own estate), or gentle stock-broking, or diplomacy, or drink, or governing the country, the big public schools seem to do very well.

Besides, there is always the chance of turning out one more of those young men whose rôle is not only to justify the public school system, but to represent the youth of England. They have a good deal of money and are fairly clever (but never brilliant) at school. Their photograph, pipe in mouth, but perversely shadowed by the admittedly brilliant (and so rather suspect) newest young photographer must be handsome enough for a full page in the *Tatler* when they eventually prove their democracy to an applauding public by marrying a film star of "gentle birth." They must practise one of the arts, not as a profession naturally, but as a kindly concession to their elective affinities, and their diffidence must continually be outraged by newspaper praise of the various objects they hold in their hand: gun, pen, bat, brush, and the rest of it. If they are lucky enough to be killed in war, modestly wool-gathering in the midst of triumph, a volume of chaffing courageous letters will appear; if a buffalo gets them in Northern Rhodesia, their sonnets will get virile posthumous reviews. So clever (though not brilliant), and, at the same time, so familiar, so

humble. The cloisters are enriched by a Gothic tablet in brass.

I bought *The Looking-Glass for the Mind; or Intellectual Mirror* for its Bewick cuts; but the little stories of which it consists—the tales of Poor Crazy Samuel, and the Covetous Boy, The Absurdity of Young People's Wishes Exposed, and The Rival Dogs, among them—are worth reading for themselves. 'Unhappy children: Louisa, Adolphus, Arthur and Adrian, Little Annabella! Your sufferings have acquired a period charm now, but, all the same, unhappy children! When I was small I remember being shown a stone embrasure in the Norman Tower of Windsor Castle and being told that my great-aunt M. used to have her head knocked from one side of it to the other by her governess when she fumbled her scales. Her sister, my grandmother, was a child of four in the same tower when the Prince Consort died, and she was reminded, oddly enough by a clairvoyant many years later, that her nursery blinds were permanently down and her mourning as rigorous as her parents', so that that year trailed a black aura thick enough for a clairvoyant to detect in the next century.

Unhappy children! Though their own descendants live in Paradise by comparison, I suppose the average English child is as much at the mercy of imbecile or sadistic grown-ups as ever. England has regularly ill-treated her children (though French provincial life

offers more examples of outright brutality), whereas the wogs and the wops and the dagoes, with all their faults, are, as a whole, indulgent parents. Furthermore, in no country but England are children so strangely brought up. For the commonsense of their upbringing goes in inverse ratio to the means of their parents. Think of it. They are sent away from home as early as possible, yet buttoned back into home life as tightly as possible for observation during their weeks of freedom. They are segregated into sexes, and treated by paid supervisors as little beasts to be kept quiet, to be mechanized for the general convenience; in any case, to be ordered about, at the pain (even if it is only a constant threat) of birch and cane and strap and cuff. The aim of all this is clearly stated to be a prosperous position exactly on the inconspicuous average line of attainment. The typical parent hopes that his child will be as rich and as dull and as anonymous as may be. If you suggest that the child should learn foreign languages, discover its own tastes, knock about a bit, he will stretch out his hands to the gas-fire as though a fatal draught were in the room. If you regret that the eminently sensible Lycée-Gymnasium systems do not exist for the unfortunate Anglo-Saxon, he will not know what those systems imply. An English well-to-do child is first something pretty, handed over, almost absolutely, to a nurse; then something problematical, handed over to a group for solution; then promoted from group to group, until, at the age of

eighteen, it is thought sufficiently house-trained to fall under the direct influence of its parents. And yet: there must be a great deal to be said for a system which induces such excellent results. The fittest survive; and their path is made considerably easier by the number who succumb to entire mediocrity. As a justly celebrated authoress once said to me: "When I think how insanely I was brought up and how delightful I have become, I can only conclude that God is omnipotent."

I open a little red book, bound in "art" boards—the kind of book that one buys in a railway station because it is so inexplicable for it to be there—with some annoyance: *Erinnerungen an Leo N. Tolstoy*, by Maxim Gorki. What a chance! A book written by a man of genius in close contact with a man of greater genius, to whom he is bound by deep admiration, and whose opinions he has the courage to reject. But Gorki has not taken his chance, where the lesser men, the Boswells, and Eckermanns, would have pounced. In his scattered recollections, one has the impression that Tolstoy tired him out. We can imagine the conflict and at the same time, the attraction, as we play with the idea of an unwritten masterpiece. One day he notes:

"He (Tolstoy) is often self-satisfied and intolerant, *wie ein Sektierer von der Wolga*. In him, it is a shocking flaw; in that full-throated universal bell! He said to me yesterday, 'I am more of a peasant than you, and I feel

more like one.' Good God! He should not boast of that—indeed he should not!" Nobody of Gorki's stature has ever attempted a portrait of which the kernel would be that one phrase—it goes better in German: "Das ist entsetzlich an ihm, dieser tönenden Glocke unserer Welt!" For what he qualifies as *entsetzlich* is the very note of the bell. And yet he was admiring it, however it struck.

Anyonè of a lesser stature than Gorki, attempting to sift the truth about an artist from the fable, is always accused of "trying to debunk" his subject. As though an artist were not, by the fact of being an artist, under suspicion from the outset. Goethe and Tolstoy and Browning pass, but with the minority. And the cultivated ladies who are in love with Victor Hugo will not fail to point out that the main body of creative genius makes a fine procession of psychopathic, syphilitic, maniacal, sexually unstable, retarded, blind, deaf, and (it must be said) unrewarding individuals, in the cold summary of the census-paper.

At the end of 1918 we went to live in Chester Square and await my father's demobilisation. The house was rambling and gloomy, and I chiefly remember one afternoon during which a very prosperous relation came to tea and, to our surprise, shovelled the remaining sponge-cakes into her bag when she thought no-one was looking. Children, however, are always looking.

There was a pianola and upon it—although it was in the middle of the drawing-room—I used to play a selection from *Madame Butterfly* by the hour, greatly to my own satisfaction. In the nursery was a bookcase from which I stole the copy of W. H. Kingston's *Three Midshipmen* now before me. The whole series were there, up to the *Three Admirals*; but with innate moderation I only stole the first.

It was stupid to read it again lately. The gorgeous crazy fabric I had built out of it for myself had dissolved, and I cannot understand what there was to be excited about. The pirate junks will pass; but Zanzibar is the name of a place instead of a piercingly unattainable mirage; and the heartiness of the midshipmen has a ghostly ring. (I suppose it would be the same, to re-read Ballantyne; though I still have illusions about *Ungava*.)

At the age of ten one is naturally a collector of pictures in one's reading. I take pride in the fact that I could turn from *The Three Midshipmen* to *Auchindrane* without consciousness of a jump. Both were equally picture-galleries, and when I had a large enough store I could start painting for myself. For this reason I hated being taken for walks. When I was not more than six, the unkindness of my nurses became legendary. They never stopped for me, it was said, but marched on and deserted me. As a matter of fact, the boot was on the other foot. If the old ladies who turned informer had troubled to ask me, I should have told them that I was

“imagining.” I had sent my nanny on ahead so that I could “imagine” in peace.

As I never saw any other children, these long conversations with myself did not seem at all eccentric. Later, when I learned quite by chance that other little boys had not read *The Doom of Devorgoil*, and *Lara*, and *Lalla Rookh*, I was in despair. Just at that moment, unluckily, I came upon a book, somewhat old-fashioned, of holiday occupations for children. I discovered that a boy had climbing-irons, and a catapult, and a collection of birds’ eggs; that he must know how to make a whistle out of bark, to work a lathe, and to harness a pair of horses; that he should have behind him years of training in minor arts which he must, at ten, forget: toffee-making, sailing toy boats, and so on. The rest of the holidays is to be taken up with boxing, cricket at the nets, paper-chases, fishing, and, next year, learning to shoot.

In a sandpit near Dorking, therefore, I accused my mother. She had brought disgrace on me, I told her. She must provide me at once with a collection of birds’ eggs and a catapult. I looked on my past with repulsion; for there was no whistle and no toffee in it. *The Three Midshipmen* and *The Corsair* had fallen into one category. They had been amusing books—whether in rhyme or not, they were simply books to read. Now I saw the light. One was a boy’s book and one was not. Dorking and Leatherhead were combed for heavy bound volumes of the B. O. P.

My poor mother, who was in no way to blame, had a difficult time of it. For though my conscience forbade me to carry on as before, I hated all the occupations of a boy. My catapult never fired straight; my father, who made much better whistles than I, always had to finish them for me; and there were no horses to harness. It seemed that I was doomed to be what the books taught me most to dread: a muff. An early experience of the difficulty of being a boy had warned me thus far already. For when I read somewhere that all little boys are cruel to animals, I tried to torture my cat and I did not at all enjoy it. Entirely on principle, I shut my eyes and swung her round by her tail. That, I knew, was the classical gesture. But her screams made me feel sick. Then, as she was little more than a kitten, I put her on a branch from which I knew she was too weak to jump and left her there for some time. But I hated that too. It was only too clear that I could not live up to my principles.

Nor could I. When at last a young tutor was engaged to cram me into Eton, one of his duties, at my request, was to improve my cricket. Stumps were duly driven into the tennis court, but I was watching the trains flash into the tunnel, while the tutor and my father bowled each other elaborately out. For a brief moment, not having grasped the general employment of steam in the navy, I thought I would like to be a midshipman, and I learned several knots out of a Boy Scout's diary; but that petered away too. And so it has

gone on. That dark house in Chester Square, where I played *Madame Butterfly*, and read Herrick with the same eyes as I read Kingston, saw (as the historical novelists write) the end of a world conflict, and the beginning of our hero's.

Stephen Duck was fortunate in everything but his name. Even now he is very faintly remembered as an oddity: the Thresher-Poet; but because of that unhappy Duck he is dismissed unread. Hodge, Dobbin, even Bottom, might have preserved his reputation; Duck exceeds the possible. And besides he is not a remarkable poet. But a remarkable man, certainly; and an engaging one. When his friends warned him of the danger of being vain, he said "that he could not well tell what they meant; That he did not know what it was to be vain; But, since so many great Men, who knew the World so much better than he did, were apprehensive for him on that Head, he began to be terribly alarm'd at his Danger, tho' he had no settled Ideas on what it was." When they went on to explain that he must not speak too highly of his own poems, he said, "If that was all he was safe; that was a thing he could never do, for he could not think highly of them: Gentlemen indeed, he said, might like them, because they were made by a poor Fellow in a Barn; but that he knew, as well as any body, that they were not really good in themselves."

That either Blomfield or Clare should have become

poets is queer enough; but Duck's case is queerer still. For one thing, he was the first of our Barnyard poets; and then he had less opportunities than any, of making himself articulate. Blomfield was at least, from fifteen upwards, in a London garret; but Duck, at that age, was "engag'd in the several lowest Employments of a Country Life." He grew up and married. He had no books and no leisure. But, by working harder than the other labourers, he earned a little more, and, as he could already read, he invested his savings in a book of Vulgar Arithmetic. He had, into the bargain, a friend who had returned from London with a parcel of books, and the two used to steal time for conversation. The books seem rather severe reading for a farm-labourer, however diligent. Milton, the *Spectator*, and Seneca, were his favourites. Then *Telemachus*, and Addison's *Defence of Christianity*, Josephus in folio, one volume of Shakespeare, Epictetus, Ovid, Dryden's *Virgil*, l'Estrange, Waller, *Hudibras*, *Tom Brown*, and the *London Spy*, came in the rear, along with a Grammar and a Dictionary.

Duck worked ahead of his fellows, then, so as to win a half-hour for reading the *Spectator*; and in six years he had mastered the jargon. He was turning out couplets on Delia and Chloe and Menalcas with the best. In the end Queen Caroline made him her librarian at Richmond.

And really the result is not so bad. Duck is quite as readable as the Sheffields and the Lansdownes. And the thought of Seneca in the cow-shed, the puzzling

fractions smuggled under the flail, is pleasant enough. He wrote, too, one little quatrain round a phrase from Swift, very comforting to Governments at the present (or any) time:

If Words are Wind, as some allow;
No promises can bind;
Since breaking of the strictest Vow
‘Is only breaking Wind.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that half the nurseries of England are epitomized in Beatrix Potter. The shiny pages do not tear easily and the books turn up years afterwards, relaxed but surviving; one looks into them, and cries that of no other infantile world has the power so little faded. The exquisite illustrations turn out really to have been exquisite; old Mr. Benjamin Bunny, over his rabbit tobacco, has not aged by a day. I have always liked *The Tale of Mr. Tod* best, about which, right up to the end, there is a kind of Strindbergian anguish; but the gentler stories were just as well. “No more twist!” is as moving as ever (for I think *The Tailor of Gloucester*, like *Pigling Bland*, had always to be kept on one side until—and the “until” should hold for ever among the very sensitive—until one was older); and the awful figure of Mr. MacGregor just as awful. In fact, that whole world is ready to walk into.

First one used to be sat on a knee, and read to, while

one looked at the pictures. Then when one knew the pictures very well one was put into one's cot, and the white-painted side pulled up with a slam. Nurse read with an eye on the methyated spirit lamp. But the old system was revived on the nights when one had been sick in bed. While the new blankets were being spread, and the mattress turned, one was wrapped in a shawl and taken over to the fire. Once more on a knee, so as to be within instantaneous reach if necessary, one listened to the five-hundredth telling of *Mr. Jeremy Fisher*, while exasperation slowly died out of a voice which could not help betraying that nurse too, for the five-hundredth time, was deep in the story.

Like the theme of a rondo, Beatrix Potter was the constant thread on which changes were rung: changes of house and changes of nanny were bound together by the unvarying Peter Rabbit. Such a binding force was very necessary. The recurrent visits to Yapp's for glacé kid shoes (as often as the elastic perished); the half-dozen gramophone records which nothing could break; the stuffy-smelling velvet suits which, long after the wedding at which one had been page, served at fancy-dress parties; the yearly hoop; these were not enough to unify a life which was split into two cycles by the substitution of a mail-cart for a pram, and then splintered, every few months, by the arrival of a new nanny. One needed a world which could be relied on. And there, to hand, was the world of Beatrix Potter.

It was a world, too, among the allies. The long

chain of nurses combined to stamp it upon me that I was exceedingly naughty. My bed looked across to the dressing-table and it seems to me as though almost every morning a different woman sat with her back to me doing her hair. The nicer ones had very thin greyish hair which they combed and twisted sharply round their fingers; the disagreeable ones had long fair hair, which needed extensive brushing with a wire brush (it brushed, though, with a plump resonant swish), and subduing with slides of imitation tortoiseshell. Each back wore a printed cotton kimono. When they turned round, equipped, there was nearly always some unpleasantness left over from the day before. I was dressed in a grieved silence. I was conscious of this ineluctable naughtiness (although the occasions when I did anything so definite as to call my nanny "Fool" were extremely rare) as though it were a disease. To my infinite regret I was naughty. When I was read to, therefore, I acclaimed the moment as an invalid acclaims a hope of convalescence. Perhaps, at last, I might have become "good." For that reason Beatrix Potter was always on my side; was a part of the "good" life, in which my mother had come and lain on the departing nanny's bed and sung me to sleep.

Only my last nanny rejected Peter Rabbit. She was a Christian Scientist; and I was regaled, when I was "good," with select passages from *Science and Health* instead. . . . Another thing about her which surprised me was the pet she kept in a tooth-glass under

her bed. It was only there by night: a sort of vermilion serpent, and as it did not seem to move much, fought down the fear that one night it would crawl over the rim and attack me. I was nearly grown up before I understood, on reflection, that in the tooth-glass she must have been keeping her teeth.

In buying books of architectural plans it is important that their appeal should not be too architectural. That is, they ought to be books by the kind of architect who pins his faith to the elevation rather than the convenience or stability of the house. I speak, of course, as a book collector; and one who would as soon admire great architecture in fact or on a post card. Then the very gorgeous, whether it is a Bibbiena colonnade or the edible grottoes of a Versailles masque, demands the exertion of tracking it to a museum. What one wants in a room is a book like, well, like Francis Goodwin's *Domestic Architecture*—the first to hand—or better still, a fine Repton, with coloured plates overlaying one another, to show how a winter conservatory can be turned into a summer kiosk.

They suggest so much leisure, and such certainty. You have a square classical house in a park; and, as you lift the successive overlays to the final plate, you see how, by moving a clump of trees, and leading a new avenue towards the village church, digging a lake, setting a ruined chantry on the island, battlementing the house, and finishing the oblong window with

ogeess, your plain Doric is Perpendicular for the trouble. And that anybody should have taken the trouble is still reassuring. That the coal mines should ever have paid so well, and the railway ever been a heady (and remunerative) flouting of God's will towards men; that West and Martin were ever hung with excitement, and a London house ever taken on a ninety-nine-year lease, and a brand new Broad Church Abbey ever entailed in perpetuity. Even to-day, when the house has become a public school for girls, the mere memory of such presumption is cheerful. Nobody bothers to plan the villas of to-day; even the bright modern-art interior designs lose their charm by the time the chromium plating they represent has broken into that disappointing scabbiness in the angles the maid forgets. But the Gothic door-stops and turreted ink-stands at least represent the personality of an age, whereas the chromium plating represents nothing at all, since any humanistic "progress" it may imply goes no farther than substituting a tin aspidistra for a real one. Not that I should have cared for the age of Francis Goodwin, even if I had been able to afford his "Gothic Mansion" or "Gothic Marine Villa." The mansion is unique in having a bathroom, inconveniently placed behind the kitchen. The marine villa, "suited for the residence of a gentleman, or a dignitary of the Church," assumes that bishops, like gentlemen, can make do with the sea.

Mr. Goodwin feels paternally towards his clients.

The game-keeper's lodge is to be built away from the coverts, since "a house thus *hidden*, is likely to become the haunt of such a class of associates, at the game-keeper's, as should have no shelter on a gentleman's estate." (The Bishop, evidently, was no shot.) The gardener's lodge must be kept neat and orderly so that the ladies can use a small botanical library during the sudden changes to which our climate is subject in spring. The Parsonage awakens real emotion in its architect, for "there is no term, perhaps, by which to designate a particular structure, that at once excites in the cultivated mind more pleasing associations, than that of '*The Parsonage House*'; a domicile, indeed, which seems sanctified to our best feelings, in the very name; . . . inhabited by a pious minister, possessing a competency. . . ."

The only emotion all this can awaken now is that it must have felt very pleasant to belong to an age which built as a matter of course, and for the future, instead of to one which clings on or clears out. Being part of a tail-end makes one lazy. It would (the metaphor can turn shrill) be a comfort to my contemporaries if the blaze came quick, while we are still young enough to be nimble on hot bricks.

Sometimes a book, but more often a piece of music, lets off a sentimental arrow. It stabs: one takes a note of the pain; and next day wonders why. The arrow fails to fly a second time.

Perhaps a certain amount of setting is necessary. There has to be the lightest of clouds in the air, an afternoon moodiness, as if one were never quite precisable, but always approaching or edging away. And then the chord or the page, with sudden intensity, stabs. The cadence has meant a few feet of Eccleston Square, the roundness of a door handle. One has slipped back, painfully, into a discord, because of a couple of notes. The snake is struggling into his old clothes.

One's first reaction is an empty surprise, as usual when one observes oneself. Loosely one exclaims, How very odd that I, *this* person with an old copy of *The Dog Crusoe* in my hand, should have been that person in Eccleston Square. Why odd, one does not know. It is the almost physical incidence of the past which disturbs one. It had been a warm spring day in the square; the cheap crockery window on the corner had been more crowded than ever; the pavement had been exciting. And that is all. To-morrow *The Dog Crusoe* will be a book which I must have read once during the Easter Holidays. It will conjure up no more than the plain fact.

The hoarder, like myself, is always transmuting objects into a point of time. A belt in the drawer means Khartoum; the smell of frangipani along the river. A reprint of Dekker is my room at Magdalen, is the moment when I felt I had crossed an obligation off the list by putting on the shelf a Dekker I never meant to

read. Elizabethan Literature. Section: Satire? Yes, I have the *Seven Deadly Sinnes of London*. . . . When I see the little book I am up at Oxford again congratulating myself on a wide range of possession, waiting to be turned into reading.

Furthermore, the hoarder is nostalgic. He craves to be once again the adolescent in a vermilion velvet waistcoat, walking along the Chelsea Embankment and dreaming of words for a sonnet sequence. Of all the words beginning with chrys-, chrysoprase and chrysoberyl and chryselephantine; and all the beautiful words of uncertain meaning: carcanet and sarsenet, and san-serif, and systole. He longs to want deckle-edged writing-paper again. He longs to dream of a little Chelsea house with brass warming pans in the hall, and chrysanthemums at the turn of the stairs; a drawing-room with gilded Florentine candelabra; little books of verse, hand-printed on paper which cuts like pampas-grass, negligently lying on the gay Russian stools. He longs for the excitement of buying "modern music" once again, of improvising, in the manner of Debussy, to middle-aged ladies with half-closed eyes. . . . To be, in fact, something other than the personage of proven experience and admirable taste, implied in the present tense, and doubly assured for the future.

It is hard to read a pacifist book without being haunted by the question, what should *we* do? What *they* did is never very helpful, even when They are as trustworthy

as the contributors to *We Did Not Fight*. For the contingencies change so rapidly that one cannot even put the question in the conditional with more than a chance of leaving it there.

War, then, has broken out. What are we going to do?

Since war in Europe has not broken out, one can still put the question calmly. And the essential question is: "Do I join up or not?" The considerations begin: I am exceedingly fond of my wife, for example. I won't leave her. I am frightened by sudden noises. I feel towards my country as I do towards my house. I am at home in it, but, if it is tottering, I would sooner go and live somewhere else than be crushed under the ruins. On the other hand, think of what people would say. Remember the letter-box full of white feathers. Think of the voices, "Yes, he became a pacifist as soon as the war began." How cowardly to consider public opinion (which means the private opinion of relations and friends). Be a hero, and stay at home, etc., etc.

Obviously the choice is not a pleasant one. It is hard to defend joining an army on ethical or intellectual grounds, but nobody ever dreams of doing so. It will never again, surely, be possible to revive the horrible little paradoxes about "a war to end war" and "fighting for peace." We shall never again, surely, fight for a phrase. But we may have to fight for a system. And therefore it is important for the mass of men who

neither want to fight nor care for the company of malingerers to define an attitude while there is time.

There is the matter of obligation. But after all we pay as we go. It is hard to see what a fatherland can do which exacts, as a right, the unwilling payment of a life. True, it may have educated me at the expense of its richer citizens, have supported me through periods of unemployment, or through an early manhood of continuous unemployment. In that case, I shall be fairly likely to look on war simply as a job. But if I find it too dirty a job, my country can scarcely call me ungrateful. The equation, Bare existence+uncertain future = Death for the system, only works out when the calculator is willing to be tolerant. There is no reason, in fact, to compel those who are not susceptible to the magnetism of tribal solidarity, ever to change their attitude.

The matter of national honour touches us more closely. The nation, we all agree, must stand by its engagements. But since those whose taxes pay the Foreign Minister also pay a force whose duties include the maintenance of his commitments, I see no reason why I should be brought into the matter at all unless I choose. No *reason*, exactly! And with the least heightening of tension, the power of reasoning in most of us dwindles in proportion. Our actions will tend not to be grounded in our beliefs, not to be guided by our inclinations. Scarcely the best foundation for

heroism: and yet touched with the essence of heroism; the unreasonable driving force which impels those who are frightened and disgusted to stand by those who are not.

But if reason offers no excuse for taking part in a war it offers none for staying out. Were the value of human life a constant value the excuse would be ready to hand. But so small is the probable public importance of each life lost—however regrettable the extinction of a few sonneteers, fast bowlers, and colonial Governors-to-be—that the possible sanctity of that life can hardly be counted among the practical deterrents to a form of murder which is nothing if not matter-of-fact. To kill one's enemies is a disgusting necessity, but a necessity which, in war, leaves no room for argument. We care so little whether a million Asiatics die of war or famine that we cannot decently over-estimate the importance, in the eyes of eternity, of a massacre only because it is nearer home.

And as if aware of this, the voice of the Conscientious Objector lacks authority. He does not seem able to manage a shout. If he could be a revivifying instead of a negative person he would never arouse such suspicion in so controlled and so prosperous a nation as our own.

What then are the unwilling to do? I suppose they will take the easiest course, and say to whoever will listen: "Very well, I'll take part in this. I'll do it because I feel it's no use standing apart from a failure

on such a scale. I don't think your cause, whatever it may be, worth fighting for. I'm frightened to death, and I expect when I'm not frightened to be bored. But now you are off, it is useless to protest. If I saw an international leader with any *authority for peace*, it would be different. But I want a real leader, someone to lead you as well in the end, someone to do what the churches might have done. I want a new hope. The last hope, after two thousand years, has ended in this. I make no comment; but, in the circumstances, you are welcome to one more half-hearted and thoroughly incompetent soldier."

Afterwards the more articulate survivors will repeat, as their forerunners have repeated for the last eighteen years, that it was a remarkable experience.

I used to put away *Adonais* and go along the beach. *Adonais* was fine enough in a book, but I was only transported by it when I found a verse engraved in stone. There was a stout cheerful-looking urn in the Minster (more like a punch-bowl than an urn), and under it a tablet cut with the stanza beginning, "He has outsoared the shadow of our night." Upon this my eye lit during the service one Sunday morning. And the words grew into this setting; into the Norman arches and the big music and the cool. They acquired a comforting boom. In a way they counteracted the disagreeable fears which clung round another monument near the Minster door, to the memory of somebody or

other "and of the eleven children Issue of his loins." I had read and trembled. So men could have children after all. For I knew vaguely that babies were born from about the middle. I might, then, have a baby any day; and was there not something about it hurting a lot? But Adonais was secure. "From the contagion of the world's slow stain, He is secure." Whatever it meant, it comforted.

When I found the whole poem I was disappointed. It needed the emphasis of stone, and a chosen fragment, and the accompanying cool. So I went out for shells.

We used to walk along the empty beach, bent double. The razor fish were not particularly interesting, and along the black gritty fringe which marked high tide there was no more than the chance of a cowrie. But everywhere were iridescent shells, unbroken. We only bothered to collect the very best: the silver mother-of-pearl flecked with colours so pale that we could not put a name to them. They were packed in a little basket; and at home the best of all would be repacked in cotton-wool and stored, in cigarette-boxes. The colour faded indoors; but one only had to lick the shell—how deliciously and, in the drawing-room, untidily, it tasted of the sea!—for the pale blues and greens to break through again.

We went very slowly, for there was no possibility of a stranger on the sands; no need to pretend we were out for a walk. After a time my feet became cold and

I had to have them rubbed as soon as we reached the steps of the castle. Directly I put my shoes on they became numb again, and we started slowly home, closer than ever to the sea, so as to snatch the newest arrivals from the tide; for the Isle of Wight protected our beach from any suddenness on the part of the water; and therefore I was allowed to walk on its extreme rim without much danger of getting my feet wet—a danger which made it almost impossible to go for walks inland except on the high-road.

The only change was when my father came home on leave and we sat under the breakwater and threw stones at a bottle. Otherwise it was a daily walk to the castle steps, a pause for rubbing my feet, and slowly home, and in at the garden gate. There were no seasons at that time and no day was finer than another.

It may be argued that if the Germans were imaginative their language would not be so cumbrous. That does not, however, save the handful of German poets. Their struggles are painful to watch; for they have to contend with a language which is either exceedingly stiff or runs to glue. In no case will it consent to be nervous or flexible, the two essential qualities (as we believe) of an apt language for poetry.

While English and French were subtilizing and experimenting, German, therefore, found itself, in the days of the nineteenth century, a prisoner. In reading such a poet as Rilke one is conscious that he is all

the time at odds with the dictionary. The music, again, of the words either bumps or trickles. In pretty, somewhat (if I can convey a picture) squat-sounding lyrics the rhythms will do; but you can play no tricks with them, take no chances. There could never be a German Laforgue or a German Poe.

It is all the more surprising, then, to come for the first time upon Hölderlin. I can claim no breadth of reading in German poetry. Some dabbling in Schiller and Heine, Goethe and Lenau, had not encouraged me; nor had the moderns. I bought Hölderlin without anticipation. And I found that I had bought a poet who was in texture perfectly clear, and dateless—not only because, in my ignorance, I could not place him exactly. 1820? 1880? Not knowing, from internal evidence I could not tell.

The more one learns of Hölderlin, the more compelling he becomes; and for a poet of such dimensions—a case could be made for him as the only really great German lyricist—to be so little known abroad would be inexplicable were it not for the odd history of his work at home. After a flash of local celebrity, under the patronage of Schiller, it disappeared almost entirely; and for many years after the poet's death his MSS. lay unread in a Stuttgart library. For the last forty years of his life (he died in 1843), Hölderlin had been insane, living, forgotten, in the house of a Tübingen carpenter, so that in fact throughout the nineteenth century, or at least until its close, his poems were

inaccessible because unknown, and only unknown because inaccessible.

For those who demand pure poetry, he is the type of a poet. He has his own climate, his own symbolism, his own vocabulary; the living world he never touches at all. His poetry is entirely of a piece with himself; and it is contained, with a hint of its limitations, in two lines:

Nur was blühet, erkenn ich,
Was er sinnet, erkenn ich nicht.

The whole of his sensible life was the regretting of childhood. He was unable to adapt himself, in the most superficial way even, to the obligations and necessities of being grown up. There was always in his mind the anguish that it once had been marvellous to move and see and listen, and that the miracle never would work again. It died from the moment he left his mother's house, at fourteen, for a protestant seminary; and thereafter the world added one proof to another that he could take no part in it. Not that he had such a difficult life. The incidents which thrust him further and further into his private sphere were, in themselves, tiny. It was ungrateful to earn a living as a tutor. Schiller, in real life, turned out to be disappointing. Each encounter with a fact was chilling or capped with a threat, but none of them need have been dangerous. In thirty years, however, like the torture which meant the dropping of water, drop by drop, on a

prisoner's head, the succession drove him mad, at first furiously and then into total vacancy. He would sit in his room at the carpenter's, endlessly tapping a piano, or writing verses to which some inner childish logic clung. He knew nothing and nobody; he never moved out; his paroxysms became fewer and fewer; he simply went into eclipse, behind the conquering brightness of the real world.

The poems which date from the beginning of his madness are perhaps his grandest, but the poems in classical metres are the most perfect. As a substitute for the world, he tried to recreate the "pure" world of Greece; and by his passionate belief in it he actually succeeded. The delicate Swabian seminarist speaks with the authentic voice. Although a classical landscape and a classical mythology were at their most threadbare in 1800, he moves among them as if they were being uncovered for the first time. You can, so to speak, hold his classical poems in the hand. Each of them is like a perfectly-shaped crystal. He does not use a difficult vocabulary; he never writes as an archaist; he quite simply puts down something clear, and lovely in phrase, of which nobody else has ever made the German language capable. It is this clarity, this detachment, which makes him dateless.

Mit gelben Birnen hnget
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,

Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilig nüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

Even when the poem thus bursts its strict bounds, it refuses to spill on to our own world. Hölderlin never gives the impression of speaking except to his own solitude, a solitude difficult to place, but at an immense height—so immense, indeed, that like Icarus his wings failed.

At least one poem, *Der Blinde Sänger*, written in alcaics, can be taken as a flawless example of exalted poetry. Valueless, in general, as the analysis of poetic technique may be, it is, in this case, interesting to lay bare the masterly precision with which Hölderlin adjusts the speed of his verses to their content. The stanza, like a sail, at first hangs limp, and then, as it fills with passion, stretches and stretches further until the structure almost cracks. Ever greater precipitation, greater intensity of feeling, could not be better

conveyed; simply by manipulation of tempo. For the language commits no excesses.

Since this is a mere commonplace-book, and therefore a suitable place (if ever) for setting an enthusiasm free, I do not fear overstating Hölderlin's case. It is, besides, a haunting case. So to combine charm with loneliness, to look the part of a young Apollo into the bargain, to fly so splendidly up for a very little time and live so very long in the dark: you agree he is the type of a pure poet, totally disinterested, fatally (as it turned out) disinterested. Look him up for yourself.

Every boy goes through a passion for castles. He looks lovingly at the plans of castles, at the little circular stair-turrets on the corners of the fat keep; and he tracks down ruins, carrying an electric torch in the hope of the stairs going underground as well, with a palpitating chance of stepping on a toad. The plans of castles are only less moving than the plans of islands. (Who has not, over a carbon paper, laboriously traced the map at the beginning of *Treasure Island*?) And the reality, so long as it does not, by too-good preservation, insist on its reality, turns everybody into a poet without imposing the responsibilities of poetry.

From ruined castles to the baroque: that is the ordinary progression of the modern cultivated adolescent, for whom Melk and Ottobeuren fulfil the beautiful hunger which their fathers satisfied with a bicycle tour to Chartres. And the ruined castle period

is far from being founded on a love of heroics. It was the ruin we loved, not the castle. Although it was pleasant to know that Simon de Montfort had stood a five-year siege in those walls and Sir Ralph Bankes had done the same, and the Duke of Monmouth too, our pleasure lay, not in aspiring to those endurances, but in tasting the change: the cracked walls, the dry moat, and the ivy.

Our fathers, who lived in a pretty comfortable world, had leisure to enjoy heroics. It is very much easier to Gothicize from the midst of plenty and peace. People in a hurry, on the other hand, and frightened at that, have less inclination for the first-rate, and especially when it belongs to an age which suggests roughness. The Middle-Ages, and with them their churches and castles, sound threatening to a bowler-hat. Whereas the soft lines of the baroque, the promises of luxury and complaisance everywhere, are at once flattering. They suggest that if you work hard enough in the bank you can buy yourself happiness. For you don't have to conquer the baroque; you order it in proportion to your credit.

The readers of *Henty*, in times of general expansion, may have felt like expanding into history as well and regretting the rough-and-tumble. We, however, enjoyed the melancholy of climbing about among the ruins (all unconscious of the symbol!), and exploring, without any dreams of heroism, the toad-haunted magazines below.

There was Betchworth Castle in Surrey, a very poor sort of castle, beside a golf-course. It had no history of any kind, and had been pulled down, or burnt down, and overgrown with a tangled clump of trees. I used to go there very often, for it had the advantage that it stood in this precarious solitude. The golfers were quite close, but none ever bothered to explore the patch of wood. One could climb up to a kind of niche, and look over the unfloored ruins, among which, like heavy lockets, the canopied fireplaces hung intact. The trees had burst up through the stone, and grew dense all about. It was a gloomy little ruin. But, just as it is satisfactory to pull the bedclothes round one's shoulders, one could nestle there into the gloom, confident that nobody would invade from the golf-course, or know, probably, that in the wood was a castle.

Later there were some castles in France. Lavardin, certainly, and Chinon, the best of all for underground stair-cases; and Montoire, which was a disappointment. And the Frankish castles, in Syria, which revived my enthusiasm a year or two ago, and made me drag poor B. up countless towers from which there was never the semblance of a view. Only this year there was Čachtice, in Slovakia, a ruin in which, by marriage, I could call myself, bursting with pride, at home. (It possesses, by the way, so sinister a reputation that the village girls who helped us unpack a picnic there had never been up the hill before; and were half-expecting

the apparition of Elizabeth Bathory, who, in the seventeenth century, killed three hundred of her maids so as to bathe in their blood and preserve her beauty.)

It is a cheap, tattered guide to the Isle of Purbeck which puts me in mind of castles. We used to sail across Poole Harbour and land there on a bleak sedgy flat. And all the way Corfe Castle, like a broken tooth, stuck up among the downs, until we landed and it became imposing. Corfe, with its recollection of the Civil Wars, was rather disquieting. At that time history had not yet been occluded by the Great War and its consequences, and the Civil Wars seemed close enough for the faces of the combatants to be like our own. Fortunately, however, the ruins did not insist on the fact. They could be enjoyed lazily, without the trouble of taking up an attitude about them. Decay, I thus early found, involves far less trouble than growth. It is much easier to mope round ruins, than to admire a house standing, especially when one belongs to a civilization which is jealous of, and so annoyed by, solidity in whatever form.

The Opposition young man, in times like ours, is at a disadvantage. When the world swings peacefully along, his revolt from commercialism and Imperialism and routine in general, drives him towards the picturesque. He goes Left, he lays about. But in times of distraction, he can only detach himself from the popular movements, elect for the back-waters which

are being invaded one by one. Karl Marx is not exactly a brilliant figure; but he is a great deal more brilliant than any possible Karl Marx reversed, any solitary Capitalist statistician in a communist society. While the majorities clamour, therefore, as ever, round opposite poles, and the minorities are so large and vocal that they seem only minorities by chance, the opposition young man can hardly find a minority small enough. Everybody, he complains, seems so interested. They are forcing their way off the golf-course and picnicking among the ruins of Betchworth in greater and greater numbers. They are driving him into ever obscurer corners. . . . That is the situation which faces the Opposition young man to-day. In 1910 he would have been a live-wire. To-day, in a world of live-wires, where adventuring is the rule, he is bound to be a non-conductor. A whole group, a year or two either side of thirty, who missed the war and were born before it, have thus turned the world into a private thaumatrope. Boys again, they go out to visit the ruins, torch in hand.

Without thinking, I brought the text of the Memorial Service home, and now it will be on the shelf for ever. It will remind me of the Legation Church, and the Minister's uniform, and the amateur ladies singing *Abide with Me*. It will remind me of standing for an hour and ten minutes in a crowded aisle. Standing does not make one love one's fellow-men, who sit copiously,

like people in a crowded train. They sit, it seems at the turn of the hour, with a dull emphasis. Dull. One understands very clearly the neutrality of the ordinary person, the total absence of colour.

The ordinary person is never met in a book. No author dares to depict him. A blank notebook is already a novel about an ordinary person. As to the Little Man, the Norm-Man, of the newspaper, he is a fascinating eccentric compared to the ordinary person. On the other hand the ordinary person is becoming rarer. Migrations and crossed stocks have turned the majority of civilized mankind into a collection of specimens. The ordinary person, unwritten-about, unpainted, unknown, deserves to be charted far more carefully than the pathetic spinster, the struggling clerk, the little frail old governess; in fact, than any of the extraordinary tribe to which the word "ordinary" is thoughtlessly attached.

A novelist would call the Minister's wife ordinary, very ordinary. But she quacks like a duck and is afraid of her daughter; she is a bully and a good woman by fits. Thus she differentiates herself from the ordinary by adding spots of mild colour to her personality. The nannies and governesses are not ordinary either. They are quarrelsome, loyal, Chauvinistic, or violently bored. The consular officials look intelligent. These, however, are ordinary persons:

Mr. Stone. Young. Wearing spectacles. Heavy. Sings throughout the Psalms. Each time the note rises his

eyes shut, and re-open when it falls. Very interesting complexion. Absolutely colourless, without being at all unhealthy, and shaved in such a way that the texture of the skin suggests habit, using the blade invariably one day too long, a magnifying mirror in a celluloid frame for fear of shaving over a spot. Appearance demands attention because appearance is all there is. In the mirror or in life is the same simulacrum of a person.

Mrs. Ridgway. Oldish. Sings very carefully, but on no particular note. Little black-crooked umbrella and peppermints. Taking peppermints to church edges towards a definition, but withdraws. She does not touch them.

Mrs. Hope. Oldish. In a fur coat. Verges also on a definition when she coughs and lowers her shoulders. Dead white powder put on so deprecatingly that it almost succeeds in looking simply like renunciation of pores.

Count Dittersdorf. A behind. No comment possible. No face in front. Only unused material.

One wonders, Do they know?

I used to wake up in the mornings in Granada, ears pricked and sniffing. My rooms, which had the advantage of being inside the Alhambra, had nothing actually wrong with them, but, every morning, seemed likely to have. The woman was dirty, but her dirt had set about her in a thick impasto. I did not expect any

reminder of the body to work through from below. She shut the window (for it was extremely cold) and lit the stove with a soaked rag. An ineffable smell filled the room immediately; the window had to be reopened. I had bought biscuits for breakfast, and the bed was always crumbly in the evening. On the surface of the hot water in my jug there was usually a very faint gauzy raft, a kind of watery satin. One suspicious finger could make a hole in it, and when she poured the water out it floated sulkily back from the spout like the skin of milk. The bathroom was less inviting because the water clung in iridescent drops to the back of the bath, which smelt very strongly of coconut oil and displayed a long unbudging hair or two.

I had two minutes to walk to the Plaza de los Aljibes, all in the shade. There was usually a little mist at ten o'clock, and frost in the gutters. In the Plaza one came into the sun, but the tops of the trees cut off any near view, and mist wrapped away the distance. Further on was the narrow hanging garden of Los Adarves, and there the sun had already filled the air with a smell of box. The trickling water began to sound no longer sharply diamond-like. I put one book on the stone seat—in obedience to an eleventh Commandment—perched myself upon it, and opened another. *Paradise Lost* and *Kafka's Castle*. Not such a badly assorted pair as they seem at first sight.

The mist began to clear, and Granada appeared below, at first grey and silver and in an hour, when

the melting colours hardened into the white and brown of full sunlight, exact. The water trickled softly, I changed my books with impatience; but the extreme beauty of the place made it impossible to concentrate. I had to go to the wall, which overhung the valley, and bask.

Granada in January can be miraculous. It can also, on a wet day, be very nasty indeed. There are no foreigners; you can wander in the Alhambra all the morning and meet nobody, hustling through the icy shade of one court to the tolerable sunlight of the next. The guardians stand in the sheltered arcade at the back of the Patio de la Alberca, or squat on camp-stools so as to scoop more heat off the bright marble underfoot. In the truce, which lasts until March brings back the *chars-à-banc*, and the Brownies, and the rival explanatory voices, the water which explores the Alhambra hill so thoroughly can make itself heard, rumbling, gurgling, plashing, and without the usual bonus of yellow film-boxes and silver paper. The towers, to which an odd confusion of hammer-noises drifts from the Albaicin, offer one face to the warm sun and three to the frost; and, as everywhere, the plain country right away from the "sights" gives a better impression of significant loveliness than the sights themselves. It is a calm huge country, olive-green and ochre, and in it the echoes which in Granada itself are dazzling, sort themselves into a scale. For Granada, or rather the Maghribian part of it, is purely virtuoso. Its

function is to dazzle, unscrupulously. It is the only major work of European art which sets a premium on impermanence, and overcomes the hazards of time by defaulting in advance. When the plaster falls to bits, the moulds are at hand to renew it. Although nothing has lasted, nothing was planned to last. And, in consequence, the Alhambra has survived anything which would have been possible in granite and marble.

In this setting, *Paradise Lost* took on surprising colours. I had come with a box of the books which "everybody" has read, and which I had not. *Paradise Lost* was the first on the list, and I had not hoped to feel any emotion towards it warmer than respect. I had not foreseen how it would glow and thunder in the south. Milton and Italy. . . . One coupled the two with the detachment of an annotation, and discounted Italy again in fear of the word "Puritan." But Milton in the south emerges in his setting. That rolling baroque poem could not have been read anywhere better than in the little garden of Los Adarves. Like a Roman marble, it needs the sun. The colours and the vivacity fade as soon as it returns to its native Bedfordshire. Spain, where the air is charged with baroque stateliness and religious austerity, turned out to be almost primly congenial.

Kafka, on the other hand, dwindled in stature. Outside Central Europe, a Wardour Street note creeps into the German language. It does not respond well to the Mediterranean. *Das Schloss*, although it remained a masterpiece, became heavier than at home. Admiration

centred more and more closely in the conception of the allegory than in the allegory itself.

In more senses than one, the Northerner loses his head in the south, especially the bookish Northerner. The gaiety of English highbrows on the Riviera, for example, is a terrifying spectacle. At last not only the bookishness, but the books, go by the board. The sun acts like music; it repopulates the horizon. What Tolstoy says of the musician is equally true of the sun-worshipper. The more he is endowed the more he is circumscribed.* He is engulfed by the fact of the sun.

By the end of my morning I had given up any attempt to read. Milton, as well as Kafka, was only there to protect me against the piles. The Keeper of the garden passed from time to time, when I leant over the parapet, in the hope of a suicide. The clock on the Cathedral below struck a quarter, and then, out of absolute vacancy, another. A family party photographed one another against the Alcázaba wall. Delicious half-hour of suspension before the North began to whisper: "You ought to be doing something," and the South to deprecate: "At luncheon-time?"

The Enemy No. 2 has lost its cover. I am not sure it ever had one, for it came out of the sixpenny box, and so probably from the beginning had the appearance of an Enemy after the battle. And to re-read it is to feel how extremely remote the battles of 1927 are. The

* Je begabter einer als Musiker ist, desto beschränkter ist er.

Fe-Fi-Fo-Fum atmosphere is intact; blood curdles obediently; but who is being beaten up? D. H. Lawrence and Sherwood Anderson, in one section; "High-Bohemia," by implication, on every page. Unfortunately the prophet of No-nonsense does not move far enough away from Bohemia. The whole battle is, in perspective, only a row in the Tottenham Court Road.

The advertisements are good reading. Bumpus suggest a list of provocative books, ranging from *Mother India* to Sir Henry Wilson's *Life and Diaries*. Mr. Titus, "at the sign of the Black Manikin," Montparnasse, Paris, announces a translation of Schnitzler's *Reigen*, "Americanized rather than Englished" (an announcement which, to lovers of "period," brings up memories of *transition*, and advanced Central Europe, and the Café du Dome full of polo-sweaters and emancipated Kentucky sculptresses). David Garnett was saying "*The Enemy* is the most valuable survey of modern thought, of modern philosophy and its influence on literature, that I have ever come across."

Within, Wyndham Lewis had been upset by *The Green Hat*, and interested by Mencken's *Americana*. He promises, by No. 3, to have read "Aldous Huxley, Ronald Firbank, Carl van Vechten, Michael Arlen, et al." "I propose," he says, ". . . to do for them what I did for Anita Loos, etc., in *Enemy* No. 1 . . ." The Fitzroy quaked. The doors of little flats in Charlotte Street were hurriedly barricaded. But, alas, it was

The Enemy that died. No. 2 declined into the sixpenny box. The work of Van Vechten, et al, either met a natural death, or, as in the case of Aldous Huxley, tended towards those manifestations of the intellect which so able a writer can turn out, to say the least of it, half-asleep, like his applauding readers.

If only from the obscuration of its adversaries, then, *The Enemy* can claim an implicit victory. Like all Wyndham Lewis's children, it was conducted with brilliance, and force, and acumen; and it seems a waste to have attacked nothing more vital. Lawrence, especially, is a curious example of subsidence. Subsidence or evaporation. Respectable dullards, like Galsworthy, look, at the moment, as if they had a bigger chance of popular survival, in the continental-book-stall, Boot's-Library sense, than a man of genius who was only secondarily a writer of genius, and therefore took too much of the light with him when he died.

1927 was an entertaining year in which to become a grown-up. The war was over. The world was modern and clean. Young couples aspired to miraculous flats in a mews, furnished in tubular steel. It was said: Skirts will never come below the knee again. Retired boxers invent marvellous new cocktails. Germans are really extremely nice, and much the most progressive people in Europe. Little tables were loaded with manifestos, and photographs by Man Ray, and copies of *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Smart undergraduates knew somebody who had known Florence Mills. Honegger

was revolutionizing music. Hemingway was "new."

To open *The Enemy* and discover how wrong this all was only added to the excitement. "Stimulating" was a word much used. If one left *The Enemy* lying about in one's rooms at Oxford, it gave an extra excuse for smashing them up. Highbrow, aesthetic stuff (an early and conclusive example of the world's unfairness)! In fact, it would not be worth remembering except in passing, were it not that those aspects of the world to which *The Enemy* was, with reason, inimical, have so constantly haunted a generation to whom they represented a first handshake with the time of day, a first parade for the new recruit.

Of the obscure little group which nourished itself on mutual admiration during the last quarter of the eighteenth century at Lichfield, the obscurest is perhaps the truest, or only, poet. The anti-poetry of Erasmus Darwin is unforgettable, Anna Seward still makes a very good laughing-stock for her initiates, Day has lately been the hero of a biography, but nobody ever remembers Francis Mundy, whose *Needwood Forest* was published in Lichfield in 1776.

One has to make allowances for self-conceit, in assessing the public interest of a private obscurity; but I think it is safe to claim that *Needwood Forest* is among the more creditable offspring of *Grongar Hill*. It is almost free of the horrid apostrophes to an abstraction which clog the minor verse of the eighteenth century;

and it gives evidence of an unusually keen ear and eye. One likes Francis Mundy. He is the versifying country gentleman at his best. That is to say, the charm of his verse depends on flashes rather than sustained effect. And the flashes are good.

During a night-storm it is at first no procession of furies, no mythological combustion, which tries to poeticize the forest

Torn from its trunk, when whirlwinds bear
The twisted ash aloft in air.

The stage is set quite gently:

• At intervals the old deer croaks:
And the lean sow with paps drawn dry
O'er rustling leaves trots whining by.

In writing of the forest on a smoother night, Mundy could not exploit the conventional idiom more musically:

Now the wak'd reed-birds swell their throats,
And night-larks trill their mingled notes:
Yet hush'd in moss with writhed neck
The black-bird hides his golden beak:
Charm'd from his dream of love he wakes,
Opes his gay eye, his plumage shakes,
And stretching wide each ebon wing,
First in low whispers tries to sing;
Then sounds his clarion loud, and thrills
The moon-bright lawns, and shadowy hills.

Of Francis Mundy himself I have been able to discover nothing. He is casually referred to in the literary gossip of the Lichfield circle, and he was evidently a person of some means. He lived well into the nineteenth century, and published a second (inferior) poem, *The Fall of Needwood*, in 1808. I imagine that Needwood Forest is fallen indeed, since it appears to have marched with Cannock Chase. Probably the Mundy's, when coal began to boom, found appreciable consolation for the loss of a view.

There are poets who are less influential through their work than through the fact that they worked. So to speak, they brought it off. They breathed and moved; and, by so doing, they tilted a mirror at a different angle; they offered a new reflection to the monomorphous face of posterity.

For example, without reading *Les Illuminations* attentively, simply by holding it in your hand, you are participating in an assertion. The little book is only incidentally a book of poems, and perhaps a book of poems last. For in the first place it calls forth its author; speaks with the voice of a manifesto next; and then, unavoidably, releases its powerful, destructive magic. Had Rimbaud lived, he could have detected in himself *l'Apprenti Sorcier*.

That he wrote at all has proved the core of his influence. Not that he wrote well. In point of fact, he did not, in the sense that much of his work is

inexpressive, or expressive in an empty room, like the home rehearsal of a musician. Yet the book is there; and to hold it in the hand has enfranchised two generations of poets. Rimbaud is there, the poets have felt; as they did not feel about Lamartine, or Tennyson, or Whitman (according to their affinities). And thereby they have perpetrated the dangerous aspect of *Les Illuminations*—the conscientious interpenetration of the poet and his poetry.

By thus welding the source into the vehicle of his poetry Rimbaud achieved a real fusion. In his own case, the poet sufficed; there was no reason to go on writing. He had identified himself before most adolescents are sufficiently developed to have acquired an identity. Most poets, however, are neither so fortunate nor so upright. Like Pound, they become poetry-addicts, or, like Eliot, having failed to identify themselves, they can distil their anxieties into verse. Until poetry, as anything other than a journal or a political poster, becomes the shadow of a shadow.

Yet it is difficult to explain why the personal appearance, almost in the cinema-programme sense, of the poet should have been accepted as a part of his poetry only now. Until Rimbaud, the appearance of a poet sufficed; of a poetic sensibility, that is. Since Rimbaud, the poet insists upon obtruding. It is of no consequence whether Shelley had chilblains or not. It is an integral part of his poetry that Rimbaud's "hands were enormous and red, and his wrists, for which his

sleeves were always too short, very thin and bony; and, from the time of his starvation in Paris, those hands were covered with chilblains, no matter what the weather was like . . .” *What conjunction, then, in the common mind of humanity, suddenly altered the whole relationship between the poet and his poetry and his readers?

The change cannot be a function of “progress.” Then why should periods of disintegration in the ancient and modern worlds have nothing comparable to show? Why did surrealism not rear its head among the post-Augustan poets, or in Byzantium? Why, precisely, should the mode of communication between the artist and his public, which has fluctuated between wide extremes, but never before changed in kind, suddenly tend to adopt a new point of departure, to grow out of intuition rather than reason?

I am not the person to answer these questions. It is, however, paradoxically true that a steady stream of culture does not broaden, but narrows. Civilization has been accustomed to checks and retrogressions. After each period of creation has come a period in which there was little time to think of anything beyond physical survival. Then, with the residue preserved, fresh creators have set painfully to work again, like those pilgrims to Jerusalem who, for three steps forward took two back. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, not only had Europe passed almost

* Miss Edith Sitwell.

beyond the memory of such checks, but the continent was solidifying into an integer. A check seemed more and more unlikely, since the new integer showed its growing elasticity by surviving internal revolutions on a far larger scale than ever before (the Great War has influenced the civilization of Europe less than the Napoleonic Wars; and, by capturing one city, Mahomet II shaped the course of that civilization more powerfully than either). The arts, therefore, no longer flourished sporadically. They were part of the regular inheritance of each generation. And it may simply be that artists became tired of their security, tired of the international combinations of reason and sensibility. If so, there was only one faculty left untapped, the intuitive. And intuition automatically throws emphasis on *the* poet rather than *a* poet.

Intuitive poetry, the poetry of Poe and Rimbaud, to a lesser degree the poetry of Valéry and Mallarmé (struggling to rationalize their intuitions), Rilke (also the victim of an uneasy artistic conscience), Edith Sitwell, and the surrealists, has not only turned away from, or turned its back quite upon, the poetry of reason, but it has evolved a touch-stone for itself. It has, furthermore, since the days of Rimbaud included almost all the enduring poetry written; for the cerebral poets, and the pretty poets, and the conventional poets, and the poets with a message, can safely be dismissed with epithets such as "dull" or "interesting."

Revolutions seldom turn out to be as imposing, and

never as radical, as they look. Those, therefore, who announce the *necessity* of a new language and a new field of experience, who proclaim, with André Breton, "Lâchez tout," are contributing nothing more valuable to art than their enthusiasm. But the fact remains that the most exciting possibilities ahead lie, not, as the fanatics demand, in the direction of paranoia, but, quite simply, of the unreasonable. It will be interesting to watch the clashes between classical unreason, as yet almost inexistent, and romantic unreason, such as that of *Les Illuminations*. By classical unreason I qualify a translation into words of Dali's visual world, intensified and prolonged—a world of objective unreason, which includes the White Queen and the Snark among its inhabitants. And Supervielle's *Enfant de la Haute Mer*, and Raymond Roussel's *Canterel*.

It is not easy to find a book which expresses Vienna. Yet Vienna is pervasive. You cannot walk in any of its ugly streets—for, contrary to traditional belief, most of them are ugly—without knowing yourself to be in Vienna. The grim blocks of 1880 flats, somewhere between Buenos Aires and the Boulevard Haussmann in style, are impudently Viennese in feeling. Each voice on the pavement is Viennese. But it is easier to put a name to this general impression than to define it. What exactly is "Viennese"? How can it embrace both the nobility of Anton Wildgans (the only modern Austrian poet with well-founded pretensions to great-

ness) and the farce implied by a little book called *Der Schnaps, der Rauschtabak und die verfluchte Liebe*, which was given me by a well-meaning person as a whet to improve my German?

The question is not so inept as it sounds, for the Viennese, from the Ottakring to the Schwarzenbergplatz, are more of a piece than the citizens of any great city in Western Europe. Their snobberies have less influence on the conduct of their life; for the Austrian, when not poisoned by complex political creeds for which he has no natural aptitude, finds it much easier to establish contacts than our own more fundamentally snobbish countrymen. Perhaps adversity has drawn the filaments of the city more closely together. Or perhaps a foreigner is deceived by the grace and spontaneity of the welcome he finds from each quarter. After two years, I have still the impression of a city confused by rival economic imperatives, but oddly consistent notwithstanding.

Most of the commonplaces about Vienna are untrue. The food, the taste in clothes and music, the gaiety, the gloom, the beggars, the Danube, are regularly described with a steadfast disregard of fact. Vienna makes no serious attempt to catch the mannerisms of London and Paris. It would be a disaster if the women dressed less badly, if a particular shade of mustiness, exquisitely, though unconsciously, judged, were absent from every building, public or private. For the Viennese have turned mustiness into a relish.

It apes the function of a pinch of salt, of a drop of scent in the bath. They have identified themselves with mahogany caryatids, lace table-cloths, garnets, dyed ospreys in the hair, and French interpolations. They exclaim, "Oh là là"; they enrich the German language with orchidaceous words like *Nuanciertheit*. The leisured Viennese lady, in search of improving literature, is less likely to read a solid book than a back number of the *Tatler*. When unknown Englishmen arrive anxious to impress, with talk of "Maimie" and "Buffles" and "Naps", the Viennese lady can always supply the surnames and the usual adjectives which are printed below photographs. To her, the conversation will have seemed as unquestionably educational, as well worth taking notes upon, as a University lecture to the anxious graduate.

When I try to show my countrymen Vienna—not unmindful of forbidding tours round remoter cities with a kindly English resident—I find it hard not to be apologetic. English people are usually intolerant of foreign towns in which there is nothing in the manner of Staple Inn to admire. They arrive at Vienna with notions of Nuremberg, student Bierhülle, Gothic spires (as though the only German architects were Wagner and E. T. A. Hoffmann): and they find a city of stolid aspect, far from the Danube, built, apparently, all at one epoch: the '80s; with a few fine palaces embedded in level streets, and singly, instead of being grouped round a hill as at Prague or Buda. They find the

food rather bad, the music almost confined to magnificent repetitions of fifty romantic classics, the night-life so-so, a tiny society desperately rooted in the past . . . and even so the apology is seldom necessary. For though it may not be much to visit, it soon becomes obvious that Vienna is the ideal city to live in. In a very few days the foreigner is offering thanks for what, at first sight, seemed objectionable. The lack of animation is restorative—so long as it is voluntary. Vienna is the only very great city in which one has time.

When one speaks a language badly the conversation has to run on steel lines; and my favourite topic has lost a certain amount of impetus from repeated airing. The sentence, which at first seemed both lively and true, has been touched up here and relieved of a false gender there, ballasted by a subtle prefix, re-assessed, in a flash, and then brought back to a false simplicity by a carefully inserted mistake (in case the listener's hopes rose too high). I therefore repeat it with an effort. "Ich finde, Wien viel sympathischer für einen Ausländer ist, als für die Zuögehrer." Pride is a weak fence against anxieties which are only slowly beginning to ebb. But the foreigner does not have to care. He does not have to look beyond his letter of credit.

And Vienna is not a town to be grand in. A two-shilling dinner is, of its kind, much better than a twenty-shilling one. A room at three pounds a month is more comfortable than a hotel suite at three pounds a day. It will, at least, have what the leisurely traveller

seeks, an air of the place. Miss Ethel Mannin has described, far more vividly than I can, a morning we spent in search of flats. They are all the same. One climbs a stair which turns from marble to scagliola and from scagliola to wood as it rises. The house appears to be something more thoughtful than gloomy. It broods. Lawyers with improbable names, Czjzek and Trska and Muckenhuber, have plaques of black and gold glass on the doors. And then the ultimate Gräfin; the mingled smell of wet wool and anthracite and sausage and tapestry, and (it must be confessed) of something very personal to the maid, which lingers in the hall; the towering furniture; the editions of Uhland bound to look as much like old account-books as possible; the silver kettle, embossed with a design of acorns, standing on an octagonal crotchet mat. The rooms to let consist of a dining-room, extremely dark, with pre-war Oriental rugs hung above the varnished dado; and a bedroom which properly belongs to the Gräfin's daughter. Four pounds a month. When you sit in the dining-room after dinner you can hear the Gräfin, who sleeps in the sitting-room, washing her teeth behind the double doors, shut since the Inflation and blockaded by menacing ferns on a tripod of hammered copper. The rooms, in fact, will not be pretty; but they will be clean and they will be qualifiable. "Viennese," you will say; without being able to pin the qualification down. And later you will wonder whether the Viennese, though in many ways at a hopeless

disadvantage, though, from the super-cinema point of view, so backward, have not managed, with no other advantage than an instinct for living, to keep a better hold on the civilized life than their brilliant Western neighbours. The Viennese character has that in it which makes bad but successful schoolboys, or popular adventurers. Its solid qualities are not the most commendable; but its charm is spontaneous. It is dishonest in the kindest way. It searches for American heiresses (once again the old-fashioned touch!) with the most genial implacability. No omelette-maker ever made a better show of regretting the eggs. Just as they cannot tolerate a bare wall without masking it with mats and pots and photographs, the Viennese do not go in much for boldness of character. They are expert in the trinket side of humanity: the charming phrase, the little piece of thoughtfulness, the momentary generosity. They attach themselves, through a hundred apparitions of cosiness, to the stranger's good-will. They are kind to the birds, on excellent terms with the taxi-man, and so forth. And, after all, this gloss on the surface intercourse of a people is the only visible mark of established civilization. It shows, what better acquaintance supports, that, although the amenities of civilization to-day flourish better on the surface of Vienna than below, the Viennese conception of the world is fundamentally anti-Prussian. It is not by chance that Brahms and Schubert lived in Vienna instead of in Berlin. Marching about, shouting, aspiring

to the manners and ideals of the Langobards, the Marcomanni, and the Pontic Huns, have very little appeal to a city, which, after twenty abominable years, has not lost the irony with which real greatness, even fallen, looks about it.

The foreign visitor then, almost as soon as he has been disappointed by St. Stephen's, finds compensation. The Kongresszeit houses in Hietzing; the vines which descend right into the town below the Cobenzl; escapes on three sides, and in twenty minutes, into genuine forest; do not reveal themselves at first. But gradually it becomes evident that for a stranger (who can pretend to ignore as much of a foreign city as he chooses) Vienna can distil itself into a very quiet street of low houses, painted the colour of rich country butter, green-shuttered or white-shuttered, and grouped anyhow. Next to a grave façade with urns on the cornice and a pretty iron balcony, can be a more ancient Heurige, a wine-house, marked by a long pole with a sprig of fir tied at the end—the sort of wine-house which flirts with a cinema-atmosphere (all unconsciously), twangles a zither into the dark street at night, smokes hospitably through a great buttressed flue, and offers heavy internal distresses in the form of new sour wine, opaque and treacherous.

In this atmosphere one can expand. One can defy Nietzsche, who has said that Turin was the only city where a civilized man could live. And then, as with any place one loves, one can begin to say how awful it

is. People cross the road without looking, and clap at the wrong concerts.

Short of very good books, I know nothing which gives as much pleasure as very bad books. Everyone has his pet bad book, therefore; and I have mine. But although it might be fairly easy game I never find anybody else to have read it except a few friends to whom, with all the emotion of entrusting a thousand pounds to a financier, I have entrusted it. Nor would my really bad book be much easier to replace than a thousand pounds. There is a disconcerting power of volatility about (say) the Book of the Month to be reckoned with. If you do not catch it during the Month it disappears. For example, I am in constant pursuit of a new work by Dr. Cronin. And always it was the book last month. Short of hiring a man to wait in Henrietta Street for the next moment of apparition I shall for ever be deprived of a very real pleasure.

It was, however, upon *The Season: A Satire* by Alfred Austin, that I proposed to write. On considering it again, there can be no doubt that it is a very unusually bad book. It is supremely, mystically, bad. Most of it is not bad in the way of being funny. It is just bad. Like this:

O blessèd moment! . . . Duns! Detractors! Fate!
Hit me your hardest—but I dine at eight.
My thoughts are stolen? half my verses halt?

Well, very likely: please to pass the salt.
Jones won't accept your bills: he funks the risk.
Does he? What matter? *Potage à la bisque!*

There are, however, a few notably ridiculous passages.
There are two passages I am particularly fond of:

Romantic boys! be still. Will angry names
Like "battered beast" annul an Earldom's claims?
Life is not wholly sentiment and stars:
Venus wed Mercury as well as Mars.
Hush your lewd tattle! seek your slighted beds!
A cornet waltzes, but a colonel weds.

And another, which goes further to prove that Alfred Austin, like others of our Laureates, had some trouble in compelling the English language into verse:

What! . . . So they say . . . Bah! Nonsense . . .
But it's true:
True, sure enough—will lay you ten to two.
Jack saw the brief, Respondent's name endorsed . . .
Great God in heaven! Our Blanche to be divorced!

But this badness is perhaps a little too showy. It is a greater feat to have kept up the solider badness of the remaining seventy pages. Or to have invented the bold retort, the English equivalent of *Excelsior!*, the exclamation at once practical and vigorous, *Potage à la bisque!*

Here it would be possible to make a fascinating psychological digression. The bad American poet, in

search of a splendid exclamation, rushes back headlong to antiquity. His bad English contemporary, too refined for so bold a move, crosses the channel, less anxious to show his scholarship than his quality as man-of-the-world. The American word symbolizes the huge, the imprecise. The English word picks exactly on something both useful and imported—two very popular recommendations. The American has a windy brain; the Englishman a windy stomach. Etc., etc.

The aphorism is wrong. Vice gains nothing by losing its grossness. It merely becomes tedious, or more tedious. The eighteenth century on the subject of love proves as much, conclusively. After reading the glossy accounts of Richelieu's affairs, and the pretty Oriental romances of the time, it is a relief to turn up Grose, and a few smacking vulgarities. Even in the act, sensualists usually refine their vices paradoxically in an ever squalider setting; and on paper squalor is a necessity. Otherwise the reader is made all too painfully aware of the sameness of sexual machinery.

Rough words, however, create an illusion. Any Buttock and Twang is at once a more interesting personality than Richelieu's Duchess of ***. All coolers, if you prefer the word, morts, whether dimber or not, sound more attractive under that name. "More in love with the Duchess than I had ever been," Richelieu writes, "I watched for the favourable moment to seduce her." One accepts the news without interest.

But had the bubble only said outright that he hoped to give her at least a green gown, one might have caught the echo of an emotion. In any case a man so definitely a seducer and not a mutton-monger is little worth wasting print on. . . .

In works of a licentious imagination, however, the absence of grossness is even more fatal. Anybody who has waded through Crébillon's *Sopha* will understand better the mentality which peopled the Theban desert with anchorites. The characters make love to the metronome. And yet what a charming idea for a book: the soul imprisoned by Brahma in a sofa, and condemned to remain there "until two persons, with myself as opportunity, should render each other the first fruits of mutual affection." An idea ill-served by a half-dozen verbose variations on a theme.

Books founded on lust, with any pretensions other than the pure pornographic (in which case Grose will have nothing to teach them), ought to have been considered, for many centuries past, an effrontery. One might as well write endlessly about whip-tops as about the politer aspect of, let us call it, tiffing.

The English oriental romancers, from Dr. Johnson onward, turned their faces sternly from exotic temptation. I sometimes try to read Hawkesworth's *Almorán and Hamet* or Langhorne's *Solyman and Alméná*, but I do not get very far. Any sofas that may intrude are used chiefly for conversations on the nature of the Deity and the responsibilities of despotism. And it is

a relief to rest finally upon the most innocent of all sofas: that which irrelevantly opens Cowper's *Task*.

I bought the Reverend F. O. Morris's *Seats of the Noblemen and Gentry*, in six volumes, on the Dublin quays. It was exactly the place for buying such a book, for Ireland is, in spite of itself, an island of country-houses; and about them, more than elsewhere, clings the forlorn, yet still challenging, air in which the Reverend F. O. Morris's pages are suffused. The day before, I had been to Rusborough, a very beautiful house, at that time uninhabited, in the Wicklow Hills. Lord Milltown's trunks, and his hatboxes, stood in a dressing-room. His music was yellowing on the piano, and his writing-paper in the library. For Lord Milltown had been long dead and his peerage extinct; without the house admitting it. The ornamental plaster-work was crumbling; and the garden terraces were indistinguishable; but we could still detect the authentic note: the Jennings sanitary fittings, encased in mahogany, with the essential pull-up handle instead of a chain; the assortment of expensive boot-jacks; the one bath, with brown tear-stains under the taps; and the heavily furnished writing-tables, with letter-weights, little sponges, silver-handled brushes for wetting the envelopes, and boxes in dark-green leather for india-rubber bands.

The fascination of views of country-houses lies not in their beauty but in the surprises they contain. In

finding an enormous excruciating Italianate palace of which nobody has ever heard. In discovering that the families who now prefer living in a mews flat and spending their money at le Touquet, possessed a William Kent house until the other day. In picturing, say, Caen Wood Tower, "a beautiful edifice . . . erected by its late proprietor . . . On either side of the dining-room chimney-piece are windows looking into a fernery, with fountains. The upper portion of the windows above the transom is fitted with stained glass of a geometrical pattern. In the windows of the billiard room are representations of various out-door sports and pastimes, as hunting, cricket, archery, etc., also in stained glass."

I once stayed in a house surrounded with trees, above which pricked the curled roof of a pagoda. They told me that it was full of porcelain brought back after the dispersion of the Summer Palace in Peking. "We cut a way through the brambles once," my host said. "That's a good many years ago now."

And there was another house in which my host, a Master of Foxhounds, cheered on his guests while, with intimate aim, they sniped the lead statues of gods in an eighteenth-century garden.

Turning over the coloured plates of Tregothnan and Mersham-le-Hatch, Hanbury Hall and Abercairny, one wonders whether those respectable façades conceal similar oddities; whether Lord Muncaster used to shoot at the statuary round Muncaster Castle. Like

that Irish peer who complained of being shot at through his library window, until investigation proved that he had fired the shots himself, in the hope of bringing a little glamour into a life lived meagrely among the lonely Galway bogs.

Meanwhile Mr. Morris's pages, as though to help, send up a unique and appropriate smell. It acts like the steam from the Delphic tripod. Hard to define, for it combines the smell of a deserted summer-house with that of a decently unused library, a smell at once damp and inky and nostalgic, a smell of leisure, warmly damp, with a suggestion of port rather than water, it goes straight to the head. The verandas, wellingtonias, perfectly green lakes, calculated stormy skies, pin-cushion lawns and rusty cannon, intoxicate. For these country seats are each so individual. French houses, which alone in Europe rival the English, fall into definite groups. They have a Régence personality, or a Renaissance personality, only secondarily touched with a quite private air, whereas Abercairny is Abercairny and Hanbury Hall is Hanbury Hall. Their atmosphere is so private and so sharp that it corrodes like an acid. Which is why there are books like Mr. Ralph Dutton's excellent *English Country House*—the product of intoxicated persons who, in the company of a photographer, move from world to world (for that is what a succession of country houses amounts to), inviting corrosion.

I like my friends to be curious about houses. On a

country excursion, at sight of a rustic lodge—it cannot be too decrepit nor the drive too effaced—I like them to stop the car and make inquiries. I like them to climb walls for a peep of the façade, to relish the lodge-keeper's replies, to wheedle the butler. "Would you please tell me who lives here?" "Lord Albatross, sir." "I wonder if we might walk in the garden?" "I'm afraid his lordship is out, sir, scything. And I hardly think . . ."

Nobody has ever heard of Lord Albatross (Recreations in *Who's Who*: watching Badminton, visiting cathedrals, bridge) and there is nothing remarkable about his house. Pincushion lawns, wellingtonias, a veranda. But all the same the air is heavy with personality. It is that house and nowhere else.

This particularity is recognized simply by the existence of such books as the *Country Seats*. They were intended for the general public; and the contents were by no means selected on their architectural merits. If the world is a great ball, to turn over Mr. Morris's pages may (somewhat sententiously) be compared to playing with marbles. One picks up a tiny sphere, notes its particular colour, and picks up the next, equally complete and quite different.

José Ortega y Gasset scores a double point by underlining the multiplicity of the world and at the same time suggesting that one can take up an orderly position. The effort, however, is exhausting, and—for I

was reading in Seville—I thought I would go to a *novillada* instead.

Hemingway and de Montherlant have done their best to trumpet the bull-fight, with the result that cooler observers mistrust the arena as one in which tough guys sentimentalize over force, in the shrill obverse to that style in which books are written on food and drink. There is the same peppering of technical terms in italics; the same high tone of discovery; the same note of challenge, at once priestly and knock-me-down. So that I looked forward to this very humble little affair, without horses, at La Pañoleta, as an experience which I could watch, so to speak, unencumbered by the priesthood.

The crowd consisted of workmen, chiefly, in blue clothes and caps segmented like starfish. There were no women to speak of; and, on a sunny day in early February, the masculine crowd was etched sharply against a ridge of hill with a few poplars upon it, by a still bitter and wintry sun. Pinkish sand, with the distorted egg-like shadow of heads swaying across it, and very yellow sand where the light was strongest; a windy sky. The setting was insistently pictorial.

Lottery ticket sellers, and sellers of water in earthen jars, made most of the noise, against a buzzing background. The minute ring, tightly crowded, hummed really like a dynamo; for it made so small and so compact an entity that it gave the impression of

having been placed on the field entire; a mechanical toy for observation.

The doors opened; there was loud clapping, and sharp "Ch!"s to catch attention. The matadors, dressed like waiters, hung about behind the gate. In galloped a young bull, a poor bewildered creature, not in the least anxious to play his part. The darts, like rockets, which were driven into him sapped any trace of vigour. They made a painful impression by their prim springing at each movement, an impression of claws and tearing hide. As though conceding to the crowd the matador was gored. The egg-like shadows flapped, and the buzzing broke into a roar. But I think nobody was disappointed when the matador dispatched his bull.

I was struck by the enamel brilliance of fresh blood in such quantity; and by a certain gloominess as the matador wiped his bloody sword on his vermilion *muleta*. The only music was a kind of infantile drum-and-fife band; and the mules which carried away the carcase looked annoyed.

There was a long interval. The sun already began to slope. But it was exhilarating, at this moment of diminution, with the light lessening, the bull dead, and a touch of cold at the shoulder, to see the second bull, violently alive, charge clattering in. The second matador was inexperienced. He lunged in vain; and it was very depressing to watch the bull, finally exhausted, stand with lowered head and wait, while the

matador, ever more nervous under the jeers of the crowd, struck again and again in vain. From time to time a plaintive bellow. I felt as the more sensitive members of the crowd must have felt on the Place de la Concorde during the Terror.

After the third bull I came home. It had been interesting enough, but, like a very low church service, it seemed to me to lack the essential. To impress a novice rites must look exceedingly expensive.

There was Ortega y Gasset to return to. I noted at the time that he gave me a high feeling of excitement. In retrospect, I am not so certain. He is a little off-hand, a little inclined to evasions: "This is not the place to develop the point," "I propose one day fully to explain," are typical of phrases which occur too often. And notwithstanding, he makes any other ponderer of the things of our time look pretty small. Like a less quippish, and profounder Aldous Huxley, he manipulates an arc-lamp. But, to vary the metaphor, he attaches his intellect too glibly to any and every problem. He is enriching himself rather than dealing disinterestedly with the matter in hand. Huxley uses a popular intelligence to make discoveries about the quality of surfaces; Ortega sometimes works under the surface, but in the manner of a leech rather than a lancet.

There is always a question how to while away an involuntary halt during a journey. If you are a person

who enjoys slow and complicated journeys: halts at country stations long enough to inspect the fly-blown newspapers at the closed kiosk, bus-stops during which everybody gets down for a drink and the vehicle is beset by beggars, old-fashioned liners in which each first-class passenger has solitary possession of a creaky cabin with three unoccupied berths: if you are such a person, you will frequently be stranded for an hour or two.

On the way from Portugal to Spain I was stranded thus at Ayamonte. The café is only a solution for a foreigner of assurance. One sits; and the proprietor does not seem to expect an order. But fishermen and bootblacks crowd respectfully round; the other seats at the table are filled, and one is made to feel like Wilde at a dinner-party, Lord Curzon at the council-table—even like St. Paul on the Acropolis; for such attentive faces can await nothing less than a revelation. Recollections of travel books intrude. Those charming and artistic authors in open shirts, their wives in gipsy earrings, always got so easily into contact. They testified to the people, and the people accepted them. They sketched the donkey with two saddle-bags going under an arch; in every village they sketched him. They drank out of pitchers, and cooked on skewers. Or else, turning their anglicism to account, they had the most comic adventures. Comic, that is, but tiny. They never sat, quite miserable, with a copy of *Adolphe* in their pocket, wishing for the concentration to read.

I was driven, before long, to the cemetery. Ayamonte is a linen-white Andalusian village above the Guadiana, rambling up a hill. The cemetery lies at the top, looking down, by a ruined castle and cactus-hedges, to a flowering marsh. I went in for peace; and walked among the great white partitions in which the coffins are piled one above the other. Only the coffin-end projects, adorned with a photograph of its inhabitant. Curious 1880 beards, mauvish profiles, cut by the cord of a pince-nez, and elaborate curled coiffures, filled one partition. The reverse, more modern, depicted high lapels and straw boaters. Nobody seemed to have died in Ayamonte for thirty years. The photographs were locked in little cupboards, with immortelles and a crucifix. The wind rattled tinny wreaths upon the ground. And here and there against the wall stood large pairs of movable steps, which gave an eccentric library air to the long symmetrical shelves.

Death in Ayamonte was grim; but grim as a bad joke rather than a *wilder Knochennann*. The tin wreaths rattled, but not terribly, like the voice of Reynaldo Hahn describing the frizzling of Paul Dukas's beard at the crematorium.

A certain type of autobiography is the perfect bedside-book. Or rather, the perfect book for night-reading, since it is not what one reads before going to sleep but what one reads when one cannot sleep which has to be

carefully chosen. Cheerful books, thoughtful books, passionate books, all are wakeful, or at least insistent on one's own insufferable indentity. But a book like *Nollekens and His Times*, or Haydon's or Cibber's autobiographies, does the trick. It cloaks the world in merciful dust. It has no edges and no strategical dilemmas.

Nollekens is perhaps the most refreshing of all. I do not suppose it has ever been read by the unappreciative pedants who are always trying to expel his work, along with that of Bacon and Roubilliac, the other great names of English eighteenth-century sculpture, from Westminster Abbey. And yet it is one of the most vivid portraits of an eccentric ever made, as well as a briskly rambling conductor through contemporary London.

Nollekens and his wife (from whom Fielding borrowed certain characteristics for Sophia Western, I have read): a dirty, mean, snuffy couple if ever there was one. And Bronze, the maid; and Goblet, the assistant, and Jenny Dawdle the cat, with whom, when Nollekens was dying, old Bronze used to dance round the room to please him, while tears of pleasure trickled down into her master's bib. The setting might be that of an imaginary biography by Mr. de la Mare.

And I like to think of Nollekens, who left two hundred thousand pounds, at the Royal Academy Club, stealing the nutmegs for the red-wine negus and crawling under the table to look for them, when

somebody, who had seen them pocketed, wondered ironically whether they might not have fallen there. Or filling his busts with silk stockings and lace, to cheat the Customs.

There is a reference here to the fascinating life of the negro poet, Ignatius Sancho. Sancho was born on a slaver in 1729, became the Duke of Montagu's butler, and opened a chandler's shop on his savings. He became the friend of artists and musicians, wrote a treatise on the Theory of Music, and composed poems which I once took the trouble to look up, without any corresponding reward. After his death, his letters were published, but they are equally disappointing.

Or there are pieces of lively description. The family is returning on foot from a cribbage-party across Bloomsbury Square; Nollekens with the lantern:

Nollekens, anxious to get home to bed, was generally foremost, and often proceeded, though with a toddling gait, so much too fast for the clogged ladies behind him, that Mrs. Nollekens was often heard to cry, "Stop, Sir, pray stop," but Miss Welch, of late years, seldom spoke to him. He would then, with due obedience, slacken his pace into a dawdling creep, suffer them to pass, and lag so considerably behind, that he was now and then openly and roundly charged with indulging in a nap. Upon these occasions they thought it wisest to wait his coming up with the lantern, upon pretence of seeing that all the umbrellas were safe under his

arm; but, in reality, for fear of a rude embrace from some boisterous perambulator of the streets, under the influence of Bacchus or Thrale's Entire; and whenever there was a wide puddle to cross, Mrs. Nollekens always made a point of seeing her husband safe over first, by insisting upon his maintaining a proper precedence on such occasions.

That disagreeable burning at the eyes, when it is doubtful whether the lamp or the dark hurts them more, is thus expelled. The author, John Thomas Smith, later Keeper of the British Museum Prints and Drawings, is worthy of his subject. Even Providence took a hand in shaping these two eccentrics; for I notice, on the fly-leaf, among a solemn table of dates: John Thomas Smith. Born, in a hackney-coach, London, 23 June, 1766.

"Could I be wrong in thinking the whole confederation of humans on board—and some of them seem to be on better than federal terms—abominable? Even allowing for the fact that anybody overhearing the conversation of strangers finds it hard, nine times out of ten, to believe that they are human at all.

"If I put up my book for a screen, everybody sees that it is by Walter Pater, which will never do. If I don't, some excellent person is bound to tell me, as she has told us all, 'You *have* caught the sun.'

"I prefer Mr. Wheeler with his comic faces and his rum-and-milk."

It is odd that only inhumans travel visibly by sea. Only inhumans and myself, reading skimpily of Sebastian van Storck, between the shrill American voice asking, "Are you still vulnerable?" and the immemorably oppressed murmur of Mr. Hatchment, "I never trust water."

"Suppose I read Walter Pater nakedly, even triumphantly? After all, he was as much a part of the ship's library as the crime stories, and the long shelf on practical aspects of Japan. I might even ask Mr. Wheeler, when he comes back with the sea-water for sunburn, 'Mr. Wheeler, don't you find something attractive in Sebastian's ideal of a crystalline world, motionless and white?' "

"What would Mr. Wheeler say, In his nest—? That insistent Tennysonian echo! Or Mrs. Hatchment, whose back, pink and cooked, curves from strap to strap of a splendid evening gown like a soufflé?

"The place is simply a Bestiary. It is hardly too far-fetched to imagine this ship a latter-day Ark, since these people are probably as well worth saving as most animals, and Tilbury is more conveniently placed than Ararat. Mum and Dad would go through first.—'Anything to declare, sir?' 'Fertility and slight intemperance.'—Then the Hatchments, a symbolic couple—l'Allegra and il Penseroso—then the single inhumans, paired as, to all appearances, at present: Mr. Pritchett, the patience player, Miss Squill, with her work in a Moroccan bag, Mr. Wheeler and his jokes, Mrs. Basket,

whose hair turned to string with the salt in the air.

“They aren’t so bad if you look at them like that. Kindly, too, and industrious. I must be honest and admit that one of the reasons I don’t speak to them is that they don’t speak to me. What could we talk about? Shanghai has the longest bar in the world. Or else Hong-Kong. We could get through the first evening beautifully.”

One hears a lot about the tragic grandeur of humanity. Yet they are not easy, these inhumans, to reconcile with tragedy. Even though, in the ship’s library, there is a book by Unamuno on the anguish of man, of every single man, on his thirst for Immortality. You could be sure that dry-goods, the club, the kids, jokes about kisses, sly affection absolutely replaced Immortality for the Hatchments and the rest of them. They are a crowd which has the curious effect of making any interest beyond having a good time seem rather shameful.

“Even the historical novelist in the state cabin puts Time in its place. Most aptly, an advertisement of his book has been lying about the bar: ‘A really delightful romance set in a background of fourteenth-century Limoges.’ Is that, perhaps, the nastiest kind of book? Or am I the inhuman among normal healthy people? What makes them laugh?—‘down he went and broke his specs.’—The climax of Mr. Wheeler’s story has been a riot. And those feints towards salacity, that almost-mention of a pair of stays. The Bar is shaking with laughter.

“After the salt in the air, the grave will turn Mrs. Basket’s hair to string. Everybody will smell very unpleasantly, liquify, vanish, possibly be woken by a trumpet and possibly not.

“It seems hardly credible that we are all in the same boat exactly.”

There is something so sharp about William Hutton’s *Journey to London* (1818), that I am always promising myself to look up the author. From internal evidence, he was a self-made Birmingham business man, paying his second visit to London at the age of sixty or thereabouts. I see by the fly-leaf that he wrote a *History of the Roman Wall*, and a book upon the battle of Bosworth Field, as well as a *Description of Blackpool*, and other topographical pamphlets. His autobiography was published by his daughter; and, as well, a volume of *Remarks, Moral, Practical and Facetious*.

He turned his ten days of London to good use. An unsophisticated, but canny, old gentleman, he was imposed upon by nothing. In the background there is invariably a steadying reminder of Birmingham. And in the foreground, a series of acute impressions: Lamps, Churches, the British Museum, the Willing Ladies, and so on. A little shop has no less than twenty-two burning candles in the window; he is alone in the Abbey during most of a service; a judge; throughout a case, sat reading his newspaper; “the great number of starving beggars in the day-time, and the still greater

number of civil ladies in the night'' taxed him round the day. Trifles, but in sharp focus.

It is pleasant to catch the echo of a voice, buried in the dusty lumber of the Farringdon Road. This little book is nothing more. Mr. William Hutton can tell us nothing new about the British Museum or the New Cut. He has simply the power of putting a voice upon paper. Wideawake, consciously whimsical, crotchety, he speaks, as it were, with his thumbs in the armpits of his waistcoat. I continually promise myself to look him up.

If ever I am rich enough to have a private press, and eccentric enough to reprint forgotten novels upon it, *The Nebuly Coat* will come among the first. Now that Le Fanu is again read, I cannot believe that the best of J. M. Falkner's novels, which falls into the same category as *Uncle Silas* and Mrs. Gaskell's *Old Nurse's Tale* and some of M. R. James's stories, will have to wait so long for disinterment. It is an excellent category: that of the dark and curious background to a possibility. The ghosts do not have to rattle their chains; there is no smell of sulphur; or glint of phosphorescent thigh-bones. The darkness is as the air, like a spiritual dusk.

The properties of the story are good too. The great solitary Minster at Cullerne; Sharnell, the recluse organist—as Mrs. Gaskell knew, an organ is fuller of terror than any other object—the enigmatic Lord

Blandemer; and the immense catastrophe at the end of the book, a catastrophe which brings all the darkness down with it into ruin. Until that moment the reader has been in an ambulatory, walking under narrow blackened windows. I don't know any book which gives a better sensation of that pregnant half-light than this.

A cheap guide-book to Pistyan falls out of the shelf. It recalls a week of contrasts. "You must come," my brother-in-law had said, "and shoot." And I had accepted the invitation because it was so far ahead. I remembered many years before, in Wales, creeping up behind small and stationery birds, and blowing them to pieces; I remembered, in Uganda, occasions when I had been asked to shoot. In England, later, the occasions had led to anecdotes, and I could no longer remember what had really happened, under the shining impasto of lies. Then in Hampshire, in 1924, there had been the moorhen. And at Eton, on the miniature rifle-range, an extraordinary occasion upon which I got ninety-eight per cent of a maximum. I was justified, therefore, in accepting the invitation.

When I was told, however, "We leave to-morrow," I was panic-stricken. In a gloomy field outside Vienna clay pigeons were fired into the air all one afternoon. They fell and broke on the grass.

The hotel at Pistyan evoked no impression of a shooting-party. It was very large and gave upon cinder

paths, like a hotel in Heliopolis. The season was over. At night, when the band played for dancing, instead of a gay throng of international arthritics, there were ourselves. It was the time of year when flat red animals crawl out of the central heating, and the Italian waiters go home.

Early in the morning we left, by car, with a very pleasurable splash. Gun-cases, cartridges, secretaries, leather coats, the hotel Manager, added importance to the event. "You must mind," said my brother-in-law, "not to fire your gun *at* anybody. Don't drop it when it is loaded or it may go off; and don't swing it about like a stick or it may go off again."

We met together by a certain haystack. Ourselves, the agent of the property, a lawyer from Pressburg, some local worthies, the Herr Zentraldirektor, and an army of beaters and loaders. Some of the guests spoke only Slovak, some only German. Everybody looked extremely wise, shook hands again and again, sniffed the wind, murmured in their several languages, and charged their loaders with miscellaneous objects: sun-spectacles, shooting-sticks, extra woollies, cameras.

I stood beside my little flag with a private army behind me. There was the loader, and the loader's boy with a shooting-stick; a couple of peasants whose duty was to snatch away my neighbour's birds and add them to my pile, so that I should be satisfied with the day; a woman with the flag; and the agent, who had been told to prevent me killing anybody.

At last we moved forward, some sixty persons in all, across the maize-field. It was very hot and dusty. The dry ears of maize, up to our necks, crackled as we brushed through. Beyond the maize, the world was treeless and flat, and pre-eminently useful. First kilometres of maize, then kilometres of beetroot. There were stacks and traction-engines in the distance, beside a few white houses; but the traction-engines were not incongruous. Slovakia is absolute country enough to dispense with the picturesque.

A whirr and the thin snap of a shot on the extreme left reminded me of the disagreeable possibility of a partridge within my range. Mr. Winkle himself was never in a worse humour. However, the partridge came over, we blazed away; and the cheats behind me, with loud congratulations, snatched it from my neighbours.

At the end of each field, in a haze of dust, six little carriages drove up. A pair of yellow two-horse victorias led the way, and behind came a kind of Irish cart. Into these we clambered, and drove from the maize to the beet, from the beet to more maize. In the heat of the afternoon, we clustered round the coachmen and ate bunches of grapes. And in the evening, as the sun dropped lower, and we watched the carriages slowly trotting along the sky-line, the dusty haze round them became golden in the sun, like the dusty motes at the bottom of a bottle of gold ink. The cries of "Pomalu!" when we moved too fast hovered

over the field; and my right shoulder was adequately swollen.

The trouble with shooting seems to me that if you know you can hit your bird, it is not very interesting; and if you know you cannot, it is not very interesting either. The period of comparative skill in between is as hard to attain as a proper level of prosperity. A little too much either way, and the pleasure is gone.

I was glad to spend an off day simply in the country. It was Sunday, and we endeavoured to find, with the aid of my guide-book, a village where the national costume is still worn at church. The peasants were trooping out, the women in white and orange blouses, with high black boots and thickly pleated skirts, under an embroidered apron. The men played up less well; and nothing was more charming than three very old women kneeling in a tiny church, under a wormy baroque screen. The sun glinted on their brightly polished boots and shadowed the white folds of the handkerchiefs they wore on their heads. The organ, for their benefit, gave out some theme of a curious dim stridency.

One does not know how to record these places. There is little either pretty or suggestive in them; no chance even of congratulating oneself upon admiring what is too subtle either to paint or to photograph. Possibly their charm lies in the dominance of essentials; the certainty that neither brains, nor the things of the spirit, nor mechanical things, count, compared

with the endless mechanism of just keeping alive. All the houses are minimum houses, perhaps washed a pretty colour, or prettily thatched, but as if they had been carved in one piece out of a solid block of material; or made on the sand, cleanly, with a sharp spade, waiting for the tide. I photographed a tombstone dated 1863, with what might have been Merovingian carving on it. Each tombstone had the same design; and yet Slovakia is only a few hours from three capitals. Where else, in 1863, and so close to civilization, could a village have no inkling of its place in time?

Civilization, however, reigns in the Pistyan hotel to-day. As a concession, I allowed a part of the Pistyan cure to be given me. It consisted in lying in a bath of warm water, and submitting one's body to a complex piece of machinery. Various tubes and ducts were introduced into me by a young woman from Bucharest, who had done as much, she told me, for all the celebrities of the Little Entente. A tap was then turned, and, with humiliating effect, a great many litres of water were forced through the body and out again, while the young woman watched through a window in the largest tube for the evidences necessary. Fascinating as these proved, they were, I gathered, inferior to those of Monsieur Titulesco.

Raymond Roussel is, in many ways, the most remarkable of modern French authors. By no means the best, but remarkable indeed. A rich solitary, he had various

engaging habits. He was surprised, I have read, to discover that nobody perceived the illumination which proceeded from him as he walked through a drawing-room. And he worked like a bank-clerk, so many hours a day, if possible getting an advance upon his quota, so as to earn a holiday. "Alors qu'il naviguait en Océanie, il lui arriva de rester plusieurs jours sans bouger de sa cabine, travaillant pour être libre de se promener à Tahiti."*

But the most curious thing about him is the manner in which he composed books, the best of which, *Locus Solus* and *Impressions d'Afrique*, are so peculiar that they could scarcely have been cast directly from the imagination. Thus:

"Je choisisais deux mots presque semblables (faisant penser aux métagrammes). Par exemple, *billard* et *pillard*. Puis j'y ajoutais des mots pareils mais pris dans deux sens différents, et j'obtenais ainsi deux phrases presque identiques.

En ce qui concerne *billard* et *pillard*, les deux phrases que j'obtiens furent celles-ci:

1. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard.*
2. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard.*

Dans la première, 'lettres' était pris dans le sens de 'signes typographiques', 'blanc' dans le sens de 'cube de craie,' et 'bandes' dans le sens de 'bordures.'

* Michel Leiris. N.R.F. April, 1935.

Dans la seconde, 'lettres' était pris dans le sens de 'missives', 'blanc' dans le sens d'homme blanc', et 'bandes' dans le sens de 'hordes guerrières.'

Les deux phrases trouvées, il s'agissait d'écrire un conte pouvant commencer par la première et finir par la seconde.

Or, c'était dans la résolution de ce problème que je puisais tous mes matériaux.

Dans le conte en question, il y avait un *blanc* (un explorateur) qui, sous ce titre 'Parmi les noirs' avait publié sous forme de *lettres* (missives) un livre ou il était parlé des *bandes* (hordes) d'un pillard (roi nègre).

Au début on voyait quelqu'un écrire avec un *blanc* (cube de craie) des *lettres* (signes typographiques) sur les *bandes* (bordures) d'un billard. Ces lettres, sous une forme cryptographique, composaient la phrase finale: 'Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard,' et le conte tout entier reposait sur une histoire de rébus basée sur les récits épistolaires de l'explorateur.'*

Or else a phrase is simply dislocated. "J'ai du bon tabac dans ma tabatière" becomes "jade tube onde aubade en mat (objet mat) à basse tierce." "Tu n'en auras pas" becomes "Dune en or a pas (a des pas)." "Napoléon premier empereur" becomes "Nappe ollé ombre miettes hampe air heure." "D'où les danseuses

* N.R.F. April, 1935.

espagnoles montées sur la table et l'ombre des miettes visible sur la nappe—puis l'horloge à vent du pays de Cocagne: hampe (du drapeau) air (vent)."

As Roussel rightly remarks, "Ce procédé, en somme, est parent de la rime. Dans les deux cas il y a création imprévue due à des combinaisons phoniques.

"C'est essentiellement un procédé poétique.

"Encore faut-il savoir l'employer. Et de même qu'avec des rimes on peut faire de bons ou de mauvais vers, on peut, avec ce procédé, faire de bons ou de mauvais ouvrages."

As with all devised systems of writing, the importance of the system has no influence on the importance of the use to which it is put. Whatever may be thought of the means by which they are achieved, the effects of *Locus Solus*, which was composed in the above way, are unforgettable.

Roussel, the movement has declared, was surréaliste in anecdote. Certainly he has the greatest sustained power of any surréaliste, although he was never consciously a part of that, or any other, movement. His descriptions of fantastic devices are really remarkable—such as a special water in which terrestrial beings can live, and in which, when Faustine sank into it, "une résistance vague s'exhala de sa chevelure, enfant ou diminuant selon que sa tête remuait plus ou moins. L'étrange musique prit bientôt plus de corps et d'intensité; chaque cheveu vibrat comme une corde

instrumentale, et, au moindre mouvement de Faustine, l'ensemble, pareil à quelque harpe éolienne, engendrait, avec une infinie variété, de longues enflades de sons." Very slowly and accurately, he continues to give actual substance to the phenomena of dreams. He exorcises the vagueness of dreams without endangering their bright illogicality.

After tea, my aunt C. went on reading *Oliver Twist* aloud to us. Partly because she was nearly through the book when I arrived in the house, partly because I was over-excited, I could not pay much attention. We were all over-excited, since the eldest of us was not more than seventeen, and I, at fifteen, was by no means the only guest who had never been to a grown-up ball before.

Perhaps from innate Celtic morbidity, I do not look forward to new experiences with much expectation of enjoying them. So far as I remember, I had not been to a ball since I was five years old, and dressed as a spahi. For that occasion I had been taught the Lancers and the One-step and the Polka; but times had changed, and I had never been taught anything else.

I had appealed to my mother, who was an admirable dancer, but also one who preferred the waltz to the charleston. "I think," she said, "that the new dances go like this." And in a dressing-gown, on her bedroom-floor, I had hobbled round with her in a kind of fox-trot. "You need really only walk," she said, as we

danced round the dressing-table, humming, for rhythm, the latest tune of the Co-Optimists.

My apprehensions were increased by the total breakdown of a cousin just before dinner. Nothing, he said, would induce him to go to the ball; and he emphasized the point with many tears. I was in an Eton jacket, unobtrusively marked by the usual vicissitudes of Eton jackets: egg and mud and wet pen-nibs. As everyone else wore a dinner-jacket, I thought of following his example; but my father's pearl studs, as against their gold ones, turned the scale; and I got into the car with a heavy heart.

It was a long drive; and we checked every minute on our watches. We could not possibly arrive for twenty minutes, and I still breathed. We should be there in a quarter of an hour, and my thighs froze. In five minutes; and at each gate on the road I broke into a sweat.

I think we all greeted the clustered lights sloping through the trees, with despair. And almost immediately we were engulfed in them, standing about in the hall, waiting for the girls to come down, and listening to the remote sound of the band in the hopeless certainty—at least, I speak for myself—that it would certainly be playing neither the Lancers, nor the One-step, nor the Polka.

A ball in a country-house always seems more fragile than a ball in London. One is acutely aware that the bibelots have been put away, and the chairs

rearranged in inviting couples. The garden, simply by existing, exclaims against such temporary gaiety; and the wings of the house, and the empty bedrooms, do their best to crush the full rooms in the centre.

On this occasion we had been warned that our hosts were extremely clannish; and by the time we arrived, the back of the ball had already been broken. There were the hosts, and innumerable cousins, who danced exclusively with each other; and there were the remaining guests, sheepish helots circling round their masters.

I stood in the door, expecting, at the best, to find some box-like girl in muslin to dance with. Instead of which, I found myself dancing with a lovely creature a year or two older than myself. "You need really only walk," my mother had said; and I only walked. By steering my partner to the most crowded part of the ballroom I found that there was no possibility of doing anything else. We cannoned from one gingerly moving posterior to another; and this method had the further advantage that it put all conversation out of the question, thus sparing the torture of wondering whether so radiant a person danced with me quite naturally or out of kindness.

Then, with a stab of anguish, I foresaw my Waterloo. Sooner or later the band would break into a waltz. I should be caught in the crowd, with no alternative but to go with it. That would mean right foot, left foot, turn, bring the feet together. Our four feet

would be inextricably locked, and no posterior in the room would be broad enough to save us from a heavy fall. It would be like the best description of all mortifications at a ball: the accident of the *pas de Basque* during the children's party given by Tolstoy's grandmother.

Sure enough, the waltz began; but I kept my head. "I like lots of room for a waltz," I said to the siren. "Don't you? One must be able to let oneself go. Let's try and find a sofa." She quite agreed.

But I soon realized that I had forgotten to ask how to end a dance. We sat on our sofa and talked; and at first I was proud to be with so obviously pretty a girl. Then it became clear that we really had nothing very much to talk about. I had nobody else to dance with, and I began to suspect that she was in the same case. The music stopped; the sofas filled; the music began again; the sofas emptied. We sat on, talking with ever greater enthusiasm, to hide our discomfiture.

"Shall we go back?" I said; but I no longer thought her particularly pretty. She had an ugly habit of wriggling inside her dress, as though her stays, which were very tangible when we danced, were too hot for her. Probably they were. At any rate, I deliberately lost her in the crush round the ball-room door; and retired to the lavatory with a little book I had taken the precaution to bring: a book of celebrated puns and anecdotes, by Theodore Hook, Sydney Smith, and Hood. It was a nice old-fashioned lavatory with a big

arm chair in it, upon which I read very comfortably, until somebody turned the door-handle. I held out a little; but soon the handle was rattled in so imperative a manner that I put away my book. It was only eleven o'clock.

My late partner was still by the door. "Why, there you are," I exclaimed. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"I've been here all the time," she said.

"Shall we dance again?"

"Just as you like."

We put our arms sombrely round one another's waists, and set off once more. I lost her a second time on the way to supper; and soon afterwards the guests began to disperse. Our hosts, being perfectly self-sufficient, put no obstacle in their way; and I experienced for the first time the most subtly gratifying of all pleasures: going away when you are not sorry.

It is hard enough to clarify one's mind on any abstract subject; but none presents more difficulties than poetry. Even the question, "What do I think about God?" offers at least greater precision than "What do I think about poetry?" (and thereby possibly only lifts the same question to a more rarefied level); both invite a definition by metaphor; neither is content to be summed up, or, indeed, to give any hope of a final and universally valid reply.

The poems of Marianne Moore at first sight are

merely troublesome. All poets, except bad poets, cut a poor figure in magazines; and until the recent publication of *Selected Poems* in England, it was exclusively through magazines that Miss Moore's work became known. Read in sequence, however, their troublesomeness, due to an over-obtrusive technique, becomes secondary. Like all virtuosos, Miss Moore is sometimes unscrupulous, but nevertheless, and although it is probably true that her very personal virtuosity has led her up a cul-de-sac, she has succeeded in becoming a poet. Her success is due to the reaffirmation of one principle, the neglect of which is responsible for the failure of most modern poets—and ancient ones, for that matter.

The necessity of this principle stands out the more if we consider what Miss Moore's verse lacks. It lacks almost everything which is commonly implied in the word "poem." Built on a strict syllabic framework, rhythm is consistently sacrificed to arithmetic. The vocabulary is consistently intractable:

expressing the principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum

is only one of innumerable similar lines. The actual content of the poem does not move in one direction, but springs, as it were, from side to side, like a camera finding new angles. At the end it often is not easy to say what the poem is about. And yet it unquestionably is a poem. We have, then, to discover some principle which justifies Miss Moore while

excluding an immense company of versifiers who, to all appearance, are far better equipped to write poetry, whose rhythms are subtler, whose language choicer, whose vigour of thought more sustained and extensive.

In brief, Miss Moore starts from the principle that a poem must be an event, not an account. Her poems are never transcriptions. They are the thing itself. With most modern poets, it is quite otherwise. Miss Moore's poems are thrown stones. Each stone, like pebbles in a pond, is the centre of widening circles where it falls. A more usual practice, however, is to transcribe one element in terms of another. The poet is turning something *into* poetry. He is, in the above metaphor, offering no stone, but a segment of the outward-flowing circles.

Thus comprehended, we can see why, on the one hand, Miss Moore's subjects are so hard to define; and why, on the other, so many modern poets take refuge in satire. Miss Moore is a sophisticated and individual poet; and her method, at its obscurest even, is never to offer the reader an apposite key, as Eliot might, out of her private store of association and symbol; she merely offers the poem, as an event existing in its own atmosphere, obedient to its own logic, a poem approximating as far as possible to an object.

As soon, though, as you begin to write a poem as an account rather than as an event, you are no longer disinterested. The poem is relative to something

outside itself; not merely (in a good sense) to the poet, but (in a bad sense) to some anterior source of emotion which he is only endeavouring to tap. Even in invocatory poems the difference is apparent. Compare Miss Moore and Mr. Day Lewis :

To a Steam Roller

The illustration
is nothing to you without the application.

You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down
into close conformity, and then walk back and
forth on them.

Sparkling chips of rock
are crushed down to the level of the parent block.

Were not 'impersonal judgment in aesthetic
matters, a metaphysical impossibility,' you
might fairly achieve
it. As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive
of one's attending upon you, but to question
the congruence of the compliment is vain
if it exists.

The Magnetic Mountain: No. 16

Look west, Wystan, lone flyer, birdman, my bully
boy!
Plague of locusts, creeping barrage, has left earth
bare:

Suckling and centenarian are up in air,
No wing-room for Wystan, no joke for kestrel joy.

Sky-scrappers put high questions that quench the
wind's breath,

Whose shadow still comes short of truth, but kills
the grass :

Power-house chimneys choke sun, ascetic pylons
pass

Bringing life to the dark-livers, charged to deal
death.

Firework-fêtes, love displays—levitation of dead,
Salvation writ in smoke will reassure the town,
While comfy in captive balloons easily brought down
Sit frail philosophers, gravity gone to the head.

Gain altitude, Auden, then let the base beware!
Migrate, chaste my kestrel, you need a change of air!

Miss Moore's poem (for which I do not claim that it is among her best) is an event. Accepted as such, it begins to awaken response, exactly as the thrown stone awakens concentric circles. Mr. Day Lewis's poem, superior in vigour, more deliberate, on the surface at any rate, in language and rhythm, produces no total effect whatever. Itself the product of several emotions, the motive power blows off like steam on the way. Execution is expected to deputize for a failure of conception.

I chose Mr. Day Lewis's poem at random, and with

some annoyance that a poet who has shown himself capable of better things should here, as elsewhere, take the easy course of banging about. It is perhaps relevant to note that an ever-larger proportion of authors have been, or are, private-school masters. No doubt, even out of term, it is hard to forget the specialized atmosphere of the life, and, in particular, the schoolroom tendency to make no distinction between Aunt Sally's which are still alive and those which are not.

At her best, Miss Moore writes to a larger scale. Here it might be thought that the sophistication of her style would break the poem in pieces; for, after all, the reason why there are so few long poems of the first rank in existence is simply the difficulty of creating *one* event in such dimensions. The *Prelude*, for example, ranks below *Paradise Lost* because it is in essence an account of Wordsworth, in admirable verse, whereas *Paradise Lost* is, in its totality, one event; as it were, an object steadily created out of a unique act of conception. Compared to such works, Miss Moore's works are on a tiny scale; nevertheless they are longer than the usual modern poem; and, although they do not approach the first rank, they have the excellence which comes from a clear conception. The best of them, if smaller, are as disinterested—for the word "pure" has been limited in the course of too many arguments—as *Paradise Lost*. The point, in fact, about Miss Moore is that she is one of the handful of

successful living poets who do not invalidate themselves, whatever their virtues of technique or language, by an imperfect idea of the *nature* of a poem.

The Photograph Books.

The afternoon is heavy, the sun brown, the concrete warehouses dirty with inexplicable slobbers. There was a little sun in the morning, but now the clouds are blocking the tops of the sand-mountains, and absorb, like unreflecting glasses, what light is struck back from the sea, until, at four o'clock, a deceitful dusk settles on the port and into the hills. The climate is thoroughly unsatisfactory. Mrs. Copley and Miss Bigelow, fretfully asleep on the deck of the *Purbeck Castle*, pity in dreams the poor boys who have to work in this kind of a place. A young gazelle, beautifully shivering, gazes at the white figures in shirt sleeves and a topee who walk in and out of the warehouses; jumps away when they try to pat her, runs after those who neglect her, and allows a few real friends to shake her head by the horns from side to side. She snuffs their knees. Miss Bigelow yawns, fingers the *Happy Mag.*, and shuts her eyes more tightly. Mrs. Copley walks to the rails with an air of purpose and tries to rest her foot on the bottom of a lifebelt which proves too high for comfort.

PURBECK CASTLE says the lifebelt; in effect, ENGLAND. Purbeck; sheep; sheep in a ruin; an empty moat; dung and dandelions; keeping a sixpence handy for the guide. But the landscape discloses only

Kisimaaua, smelly and covered with sand, thinly banked below the tamarisks into a mound, and falling out of the branches in grey powder if you happen to brush against them. Mrs. Copley thinks it will rain; but it won't. Weather-wise in Berkshire, she lifts her hand. H'm, feels like rain. The clouds are coming down. She has a small aneroid, she remembers, in her cabin.

To keep up the spirits of the colonials, the Duke of Naples himself has a large farm inland, behind the now-invisible hills. It might be rubber, thinks Mrs. Copley, who sees a van with the royal arms standing in the black doors of a warehouse; and perhaps a banana or two. She has been reading a handbook to Eritrea, and drat! she has left it on the table at tea. The hectic sounds of a string trio, unaffected by the heat and the emptiness of the Social Hall, bursts on the deck for a second as she opens a door. She has gone; and at last Miss Bigelow can sleep.

At Herradura (across how many seas?) the sun also is shut off, by the heavy Colombian air, heavy with rain, but with a rain so light that it scarcely marks the brown puddles, and scarcely thickens the clear stone-blue of the sea, and scarcely lies in beads on the drooping heads of the palms; but rather, like some gum, smears the veins of the leaves and brings out of them an exhausted breath, mixed with the hidden rotting of branches and fawn-brown undergrowth into a smell of perpetual autumn.

Quite at the mouth of the river a brushy island

almost blocks the passage of ships. A quarantine station, a light-house, and half a dozen houses on piles lie to one side of a bay not much larger than a child's scoop. To the other, a score of rude huts run up out of reeds, with wooden corner-posts and a patch or two of corrugated iron in the roof to keep a square foot unsaturated within. When the rain stops, the sun falls on the river with extraordinary gaiety, mops up the oozy forest, and fires the birds. Instead of being a reptilian clearing, impenetrably surrounded, the village by the light-house becomes romantic. Nothing was ever more green than its luxuriance, more white than its walls, more enchanting than the empty miles of forest, or if not empty unknown. But when it rains, nothing was ever more sopped, more hopeless, more grey, nothing more tedious than the endless drift of fat hummocks on the full river, small islets sometimes, bumping into creeks, or holding out to sea.

The siren of the *Dom Pedro II* sounds over three miles of swamp as she leaves Herradura. Prefects of provinces, black-coated generals and commercial travellers, sit under the fans, positively sober or positively tight. Birds are shaken in their sandy nests as the wash of the boat laps the banks, and reeds are bent back to discover the dark transparency of the swamp. Flat and soaked grey, the forest covers animals concealed with the desperation of a child, moving in almost wholly lightless passages among the branches and the water.

Mrs. Copley returns. They've spilt tea all over the book, and the red comes off on her fingers. But the red would have come off anyway because her fingers so easily get puggy in the heat. There is scarcely any movement in Kisimaua to watch, so she goes back to her chair. A chain clanks, a door shuts on thundering rollers, a car labours behind a wheezy engine, a nigger voice shouts, a far-away voice replies; close at hand a steward hurries along the deck with a musical pile of dirty cups on a tray. Everyone is on shore, says Mrs. Copley, making conversation. All the same, this place is only like any other of the same kind, says Miss Bigelow drowsily.

The *Dom Pedro II* carries no ice, and all the commercial travellers are angry. At the Ritz in Herradura there had been plenty of ice. "If you hadn't seen that spot since five years you wouldn't know it," says Mr. Franklin. "Believe me," he says. Then, on another tack, "I've got a feeling for this old tub." Mr. Franklin travels for Vickers.

Nobody speaks. The eyes of his fellow-travellers are blank. There is no ice. The journey has gone to pot.

Like the cry of a solitary bird, the siren of the *Dom Pedro II* drifts over three miles of swamp to the light-house. Indians in a rough canoe, fishing rapidly under a spongy bank, recollect the strength of the wash, and keep an eye on the river-bend for the first puff of that antique funnel. The canoe bends right out of the current to avoid the tuffets, floated from hidden

backwaters, broken off steaming water-meadows, which drift incessantly, revolve in a whirlpool, dip their bobbing reeds at a corner and finally hang feebly to a rotten log until the river breaks them into muddy packets. On the bank the rain rots the petals of the uppermost flowers, This bank is unknown. No one has pierced, and there is no reason to pierce, the tangle. Canoes hide a hundred yards up the brown arms of water, and on one such arm there are the ruins of a bamboo shed beside a few piles driven into the water-bed. It seems almost wetter here, and mournfully silent. The silence is india-rubber; blunted, made sadder, by the variety of wet and motionless smells. The siren sounds far fainter behind the thick uninhabited trees.

What are we to do when it rains so? how can we quicken the movements of the country? what noise are we to make? . . . A historic gramophone, with a handkerchief rammed into its horn, lets all the records sound like a hurdy-gurdy made of tin. At night, when the oil-lamps stream in puma-coloured stripes through gaps in the bamboo, this rattletrap music streams out too, drum—dara—drum, while the Colombians lie without speaking; or sit in the soft transfiguration of the light at a square table, vacant as animals; or finger a pack of cards. What are we to do when it rains so? There is a nasty mess of rain-water, and green stuff, and a bad fish, at the bottom of the canoes.

“H’m, looks like rain,” says Mrs. Copley; and indeed

the landscape is taking on a most curious appearance. The afternoon is nearly over, and suddenly a fearful oblong of light, orange and thunderous, splits through the clouds behind Kisimaua and falls on the head of mountains we had quite forgotten, and lights ladders of rain or sand in the air above them—a window in the black, as though majestic things were preparing behind the clouds.

Miss Bigelow prepares a remark about the Second Coming, and only checks it for fear Mrs. Copley might think her affected. So she says instead: "With the clouds coming over this way, I shouldn't wonder if it did rain before dark." Mrs. Copley wipes the red off her hands on to the underside of the ship's cushion while she thinks Miss Bigelow is not looking. Miss Bigelow, however, notices this.

Beyond the warehouses a long iron palisade is pierced by a narrow gate with a sentry-box beside it. Beyond this again, in the main road, a row of taxis is waiting, taxis which honk their horns in concert whenever a tourist adventures himself in sight. But there is nowhere to drive to. Should you go left, there is a broad unfinished street lined with tamarisks. In a waste patch at the end a score or more camels mouth and rumble, in the shade of the Catholic church. Round about—neat trunks waiting for a lorry—the Government bungalows are neatly stacked. Should you go right, you will find a mosque or two, and a labyrinth of alleys, with dyed threads of silk stretched

along the walls to dry, and sleepy Goanese in little lightless shops, who sell the nastiest French scent in the smallest bottles, and provisions in fly-blown tins. Look, there's a splendid Arab door, say the tourists, to justify their taxi, and indeed here and there is a carved lintel. Or: Look, there's the Portuguese fort Major Furness was reading about. And, sure enough, there it is. "They brought the stone all the way from—"; nobody knows from where. "Not too fast. Miss Puxley feels the heat."

There is the same danger in breathing that air as in eating powdered ginger with a melon. Spread on the moist particles of a human body, the bone-dryness may easily choke one; the air is sprinkled, bright and hard, on flesh that longs for water only, and even in the dusk, although it pricks the lungs less, it lies round the body with the clinging persistence of those spider-webs with which villagers try to stem a bleeding wound. Tourists from the *Purbeck Castle*—though tourists for the moment only, since some are joining their husbands in business at Durban, some are returning from three months' leave and only a few are travelling for the sake of a flirtation with the ship's officers—tourists from the *Purbeck Castle* try to buy some boracic and an eye-bath, some films and vegetable laxative. They will find that there are no European shops. At the Hospital, perhaps, one might buy the boracic, but it is a Monday and the pharmacy will be shut. Disconsolate, they drink bottled lemonade on a wooden terrace, while

someone arrives in the bungalow hotel, followed by half a dozen niggers carrying enormous trunks of cheap metal painted in ochre to represent, apparently, bird's eye maple; and brown-paper parcels burst at one end. The last nigger carries something wholly unexpected, such as a child's scooter.

And out of Herradura, so many seas away, the *Dom Pedro II* warily moves, out of the cluster of flimsy jetties, the assembly of open barges, the impotent sight of the one gunboat, named after an important colonel. After the rain, Herradura is paved with water. In front of the wooden arcades, generally supported on Doric columns in which the fluting is represented by corrugated iron, sulphur-coloured pools overflow the low pavement and drain into the roots of the grass patches which force through the roadway. A wooden church with a tall corrugated spire, and scagliola pillars beside the door, drips rain on the negro ladies and their banana bunches. The spire drips like an old hat. The streets are a sick yellow with mud, even in the smart quarter of arcades where there are low shops in rectangular blocks. From where we stand we can see the Malecon, tarred and broad; cars pass the end of the street. But from where we stand we can see the other end of the street: the bamboo huts on piles, the trickle of smoke through the wet leaf-roof, a scarlet petticoat on the tummy of fifty small nigger girls.

The siren sounds. "The authorities have done a

powerful lot these last five years," Mr. Franklin repeats. But he is looking at a stretch of the waterfront which was lately burned, so that the black piles are ridiculous in that sopping air, and the round beams which lie on the ground look like dead animals black and stiff from exposure. A tangle of wires, obscure nerves, hangs out of the heart of a block of concrete. Pear-shaped lobes of damp droop down the useless concrete walls. "But they'll have to spend a packet yet," Mr. Franklin sighs. And then the *Dom Pedro II* turns a corner and the high dome of the Customs-House alone shows above the drenched low trees which, as the boat swings, slowly occlude the little length of Herradura.

Soon it will be dark.

As soon as we say that, it is dark. Darkness does not come down from the sky, but light is drawn up from the earth. In a quarter of an hour it is dark, but not with the night's darkness, for this dark is only an absence of light, and not the pall, starry or sullen, which will wrap us all up in an hour or two. So we move in a kind of dimness, a vacancy, a little conscious of our lamps until the night has quite declared itself.

"Will you be wearing your pink again this evening?" Miss Bigelow inquires, "I only want to know, because we clashed badly last night, and Mr. Pertwee has got such an eye for colour."

"If you mean you want to wear your taffeta I'll wear that flowered chiffon. The one Mr. Whittaker

trod on. It has been most beautifully mended," says Mrs. Copley, rubbing her red fingers.

"Your Port Said earrings would be lovely with that," says Miss Bigelow to encourage her.

"Too barbaric." The earrings are dismissed.

The ladies retire. Bath stewards are busy behind the heavy doors of the bathrooms, which are always wet underfoot and sticky to sit in: bathrooms which smell of pear-drops. Steps sound on the gangway, as the passengers return, retire to their cabins and ring the bell. Gnat-like, the bell sounds here and there, and over it, perambulating the ship, a breathless bugle announces that dinner will be in half an hour. The passengers dress hurriedly, for cocktails are cheap at sea, and we all can afford one.

Her pale eyes gleaming, the gazelle stands at the bottom of the gangway, snuffing as the white figures approach, and rearing back if they notice her. Her small feet trip on the cement when she moves to the brilliant ambiance of an electric standard, or the dull shadow of a warehouse. The dusk wind ruffles off the harbour, and she turns into it, catching the quick air which dies so soon, and minutely quivering. Her neck arches; her horns dip. The wind has gone again, and she trots obediently away to some engagement. We shall not see her any more. Indeed, the night takes away all visible life from Kisimaua. No doubt there is a rattle of dice in the club, and a flush of siphons, and some sort of laughter, but down at the harbour evenly-

spaced lights shine on nothing. Walk along the water's edge and you will be distracted by nothing but the alternation of light and shadow as you go from lamp to lamp. The *Purbeck Castle* is a mass of lights, and the tourists who have been on shore only now notice that a big Italian boat has come in behind her. The brilliance of these boats is as surprising as the electric activity of a newspaper office at night. But all about is silence and the early darkness, undisturbed by the slow walk of a solitary negro.

With Herradura we are no more concerned. There, too, the waterfront is dark and still. On the Malecón a few cars are still displaying their owners, but at the further end of the town, the less smart, there is little to hear but the gramophone in flimsy nigger hotels, little to watch but the rats on the muddy shore, between jetties, and the irregular procession of nodding tufts on the current, swishing past a rusty dinghy with someone asleep at the bottom—for the rain is over and there are three stars to be seen—and mean barges, drifting smoke through a thin iron chimney. Under the arcades, on the other side of the road, the bootblacks and the very poor are settling down to sleep.

But how shall I describe the silence by the island at the river's mouth? Because a pilot has to be put off by the *Dom Pedro II* there is a certain expectancy by the lighthouse, but an expectancy without interest. The few houses, more rickety, it seems, than by day (for the light shines through them and bathes the curving

leaves outside) are no more than lanterns built round the wick of their lamps; and the little community, ant-like, clusters in an iron shack beside the jetty to hear the hot repetitions of half a dozen gramophone records. Spokes of sound fall on far-distant corners of river and forest, rather sadly, rather hopelessly. In the brown arms of water thrust into the heart of the trees there is not the ghost of a canoe to trouble the surface, not a dream to flutter the even surface of sleeping brush, not a foot to fall, noiseless, on the wet plaits of underbrush. There is nothing animate which might remember, nothing with an eye to resent the night, nothing human to aspire, nothing animal to plot or covet, nothing but a fish, to convulse a fragment of water so that a spoonful of mud eddies, invisibly, to the surface, and falls once more, grain by grain, into the useless silence. The spiked crown of the lighthouse flashes on the water but not here.

The siren! But quite a mile away. Now, the siren close at hand! The pilot must be off quick. Clustered on the deck, tepid drink in hand, the Colombian farmers and the commercial travellers watch a spluttering pinnacle come into the circle of the starboard light and go away again into the night river. Nobody takes any interest whatever in the pilot nor in his emerald destination—emerald where the dark wicks catch the top-side of a leaf. We must not be romantic about him.

“Bloody stuffy,” says Mr. Franklin, beating off the insects with his great hat.

And at last, even at Kisimaua, there is a certain stir. The Italian boat, which has been in port since mid-afternoon under the pretext of taking in a cargo of wood for Mogadiscio, is waking, almost moving. The work, which seems so easy, of raising an anchor, casting off a couple of ropes, and putting to sea, is laboriously begun. The derricks long idle—for the cargo was shipped in no time—busily clank. The gangway resists a first attempt to roll it away. And at the same moment the bugle, more than ever incompetently tuneless, clamours for dinner on the *Purbeck Castle*. Anxiously in their cabins the ladies are doing up hooks and fastening their garters. Mr. Pertwee and Miss Tremlow are giving a little cocktail party in the bar. The captain, who came down early, is floridly jolly by now; the doctor, though a trifle thin, perhaps harassed, is thinly happy too; Miss Tremlow is in the seventh heaven. The misanthropes, Mr. Brakespeare and Mr. Prout, the millionaire, sit in leather armchairs and read novels in a manner which is generally considered offensive.

But Miss Bigelow, regardless of dinner, regardless of Mr. Pertwee, is standing on the top deck. When the small steward who blows the bugle comes to her side of the deck, she turns round on him with irritation. So furious a summons is ridiculous. Miss Bigelow knows perfectly well that dinner is ready, thank you. But she chooses to watch the Italian ship.

With slow tortured ingenuity the Italian ship is

sidling into the deeper water where she can turn. She displays a lighted flank, a flank of round yellow eyes, sometimes cut off by a curtain, or by the movement of somebody in a cabin, so that the eye winks. She moves almost imperceptibly until she seems to cover the sea. In her lonely dark embrasure Miss Bigelow leans far over the rails. The ship which, by day, had stood dully against the cement shoulder of the quay, fills her with obscure emotions. The hot night, the steamy tide—but there is no tide—the twinkling of Kisimaua, the inexplicability of, of everything (she says vaguely), depress her, but soothe her too. This is abroad; the lifebelts evoke no ruins, no cool associations with Weymouth. But her emotions become almost too poignant when a musical gong sounds over the Italian ship, quavering along the decks. Figures move, unreal as phantoms, smaller as the ship goes faster; a beam of light strikes the white letters on the bow: *Luigi Mattoni*. Why can Miss Bigelow take no part? The gong rises; she remembers bees in the limes; Kisimaua twinkles; there is no part for her there either. Obscurely, her eyes fill with easy tears. Good-bye, alas, good-bye. She recalls Mrs. Copley wiping the red stains off her fingers—tea falling on a cheap novel—barbaric earrings. Suddenly the *Luigi Mattoni* has gone so far that it is not pathetic at all. It is not going away. It is no more exciting than one of the far-away liners we pass at sea, not even with a remote salute, a puff of white, from the siren.

Hot though it is, Miss Bigelow reflects, one must eat. And down she goes.

Without interest, as the fresher air of the sea touches his wrists, Mr. Franklin watches the lights of the island, and finally the lighthouse itself, weaken and disappear.